

THE WIRE

adventures in modern music



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**Mark E Smith's
jukebox**

A-Z of Prog Rock
part two

**Guide to
Independent Labels**

Cuba's Sonic Voodoo

**Morton Feldman's
Rebirth**

**Aphex
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Getting on-line with the Internet's hippest home page





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editor's idea

It's been a while since we rolled this column out — not since May 94, in fact. What's the occasion?

All magazines go through changes — sometimes even for the better. With this issue of *The Wire*, regular readers will notice a few subtle tweaks, some line tuning here and there, a little oiling of the wheels — not changes, exactly, but we hope they make a difference.

Some of these are editorial — we've reintroduced this column, for a start, and renamed our regular feature looking at music from more or less overlooked corners of the world. It's now called *Global Ear* (see, we think, than its old *Letter From* heading). We've also given our columnist Clive Bell more space to pursue his irreverent investigations into music's more bizarre outcroppings — you'll find him in his new regular slot at the back of the magazine.

Mostly, however, we think we've improved on the look of the magazine, courtesy of our new designer Robin Hawes, replacing Doug Ananno who is moving on to pursue his interests in multimedia (with, among others, the brilliant *State 51*, who you can read about on page 73 in our monthly scan of the music/multimedia interface).

Newcomers, on the other hand, will hopefully find something in this issue of what it is about this particular music magazine, one among maybe hundreds, that keeps our regular readership coming back for more each month.

For the benefit of those new to *The Wire*, perhaps those of you who picked it up on the strength of this month's supplement on the early days of Sonic Youth

and New York's No Wave scene, we believe you have bought into the only current, viable alternative to the rest of the (mainstream) UK music press (yes, sure we biased, but we think we've got good reason to be).

As far as we're concerned, this is one of the most exciting periods in music for years (and we're not talking about the new Merseybeat single or Eric Clapton unplugged), a time of fresh hybrids, strange new connectors and hair-raising adventures exploding right across the musical spectrum.

Not that you'd know any of this from reading the majority of other UK music mags, which seem intent on mining music in a climate of stupefying banality, replacing its potential for forward motion with an endless Möbius loop through period settings, or useless exercises in mundane gossip and myth-making.

So, without wanting to sound pompous, this is our continuing mission: to recognise vanguard musics of all stripes (electronic, rock, jazz, jungle, classical, world, and all the myriad stuff that falls between the cracks of these hard, fast and increasingly redundant categories) as fellow travellers in the flight from mediocrity and conservatism, and to give them the kind of passionate and intelligent coverage they deserve — courtesy of some of the best music critics around, and regardless of commercial imperatives or industry demarcation — which is currently denied them.

In an age of accelerated culture, maximum thrills occur at the frontline — any further back it's all level-headed perspectives and dewey-eyed nostalgia. So if this is your first issue of *The Wire*, welcome aboard — it could be a hell of a ride. **TONY HERRINGTON**

Coming at ya in the May issue of *The Wire*:

Scott Walker — Richard Cook hails the return of the hunter

Isaac Hayes — Walking in Memphis with the godhead of Symphonic Soul

4 Hero — Kodwo Eshun meets the virtual Junglists

Joe Carducci — Simon Reynolds argues the toss with the pop theorist

Plus all the usual pages of features, CD reviews, books, multimedia, live events, free offers and more... **On sale Tuesday 25 April**

letters

Write to: Letters, *The Wire*, 45-46 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF, or fax: 0171 287 4767, or E-mail: the_wire@ukonline.co.uk
Every letter published wins a FREE CD

Prog rock reactions

I am writing to express my pleasure at your retrospective on the glory days of Progressive rock (*The Wire* 133). This was the area I first cultivated when I began to discover music, and the more pretentious, the more I loved it. However, as my taste matured, much of it came to seem risible. Your piece reminded me of what I recall as the golden age of music journalism, 1973-75, when the Progressive scene was almost total crap, and the rock press devoted huge articles to fabulously ad hominem attacks on its exponents. Hilarious, especially when the targets rose to the bait, though sadly of limited effect: Jethro Tull did not permanently disband in face of the torrent of abuse unleashed by *A Passion Play*, more the pity.

At the same time, I feel nostalgic. As a teenager discovering music for the first time, I was deeply moved often by the half-baked experiments of the genre, protected by naivety from seeing that the emperor had no clothes. Ignorance was truly bliss, and, sad to say, I doubt in my mature cynicism I will ever be so carried away again.

But it cannot be denied that, with very few exceptions, Progressive Rock (let's give it the capitals it demands) was, and still is, utter rubbish. I expect part two of the article to see the axe wielded sure and true — especially at Yes, there are few things that cause me deeper embarrassment than to be reminded that I was a big fan. Go for the regular **David Jenkins**, Cheshire

Loved the first part of article on Progressive rock and am eagerly waiting the next instalment.

However, as a Focus devotee, I'm not entirely convinced that Jan Akkerman

ever signed for the Windham Hill label. I think you will find that Windham Hill was actually formed by William Ackerman, and that Jan Akkerman, while equally talented on the acoustic guitar, has never actually recorded for them.

Keep up the good work.
Mark Brennan, *Porty's Productions*,
Kingston Upon Hull

Maybe this was what you were after, maybe you don't care, but I have to respond to the first part of your A-Z Of Prog Rock.

Call me naive if you like, but I was expecting an objective resume of a legitimate genre of popular music. What I find is just a smart-arsed slagging off of bands the writer doesn't like that isn't even particularly original. Why bother pointing it at all? Shortage of material?

While I would not dream of suggesting that every Prog rock track ever recorded is wonderful — nobody can say that about any form of music — what I do get tired of is the attitude that a high degree of musical ability is somehow detrimental. The logic of that is that Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Vladimir Ashkenazy, et al have no 'validity' because they were late masters of their instruments. What the hell is wrong with being musically talented? Would the writer also advocate ignoring skilful footballers, painters, writers, actors on the same basis? The whole attitude smacks unpleasantly of musical fascism to me.

Steve Grantham, *Maidenhead*

Tricky subject

Re Ian Penman's article 'Black Secret Technology' (*The Wire* 133).

Much as I admired his learned review of *Moonquake* by Tricky, I would like to correct a few facts for Mr Penman.

I, for one, would feel guilty if I thought of John Martyn as a "proud definition of wayward Englishness". As a dihard John Martyn fan since longer than I care to remember, I could never visualise him as being English. I am not a short-sighted nationalist by any account, but I firmly believe it is Martyn's Scottish character that gives him an extra edge and I am sure that five million others would agree. Later in the same article, John's 'Englishness' is cited again. However, when Tricky or Massive Attack are cited, Mr Penman can be fairly specific in locating them in Bristol.

On a positive note, Mr Penman kindly omitted One Dove's origins when he was referring to "the palest music in the world".

In an article that mentions Greil Marcus's in *The Fossil Bathroom*, I think that any references to nations or races should be clearly thought through.
Hugh D Bontie, *Cyclebank*

Multicultural debate

I was surprised that in *The Wire* 132, you printed not one but two letters vilifying Glyn Wilcock for taking Richard Cook to task (over his article arguing against musical eclecticism in *The Wire* 130).

Allowing Cook right of reply in which he guiltily confessed to submitting "half-arsed" copy was amusing enough to make me re-read the article and Wilcock's response. The latter's crime? Defending the rights of musicians to create freely and, as Binan Eno puts it, "define a bunch of things as being related to one another and making a picture". Isn't this supposed to be the spirit of *The Wire*?

A magazine subtitled 'Adventures In Modern Music' isn't the place I ever expected to read the lies of the second

letter from Lee Edwards, where he attacks Wilcock's group London Labyrinth, which he has never heard, for being 'multicultural'.

Please, we don't want to read this inexcusable, narrow-minded shit.

G Stanton, *Gwent*

Flux off

Can someone tell me where I can get a T-shirt like the one John Zorn is wearing on the Soundcheck page (*The Wire* 132)? Thanks.

Flux the flux

Barry Edgar Picher, *County Donegal*



PHOTO: ANDREW DODD/CORBIS

sounding off

Live dates, multimedia events, happenings...

Compiled by **Rob Young**

New items should reach us by
Friday 7 April for inclusion in the May issue



Brian Eno & Laurie
Anderson shock corridor

Self Storage At the edges of our Cities, numerous anonymous warehouses and former factories have been converted into private storage space. Concealed behind the uniform, sealed doors are closets of personal effects, unwanted belongings, residues of on-hold business projects, stray shipments of goods looking for a buyer. A sequence of such units in the former Alcan Foil factory in Wembley, North London, has been hired for a site-specific multimedia installation project by Brian Eno and Laurie Anderson. Joining forces with Arianelle (the artistic enablers responsible for Rachel Whiteread's controversial East London concrete house), Eno and Anderson, together with 18 Royal College of Art students, fill 30 storage spaces with assemblages of their own design, storing a range of unexpected sights and sounds. The aim, according to Eno, is "to co-opt the inherent charge of such a place, and to make some things that focus that charge, amplify it and modulate it in unexpected ways. We intend to build an intricate journey through this strange and turvily populated urban interior, through whispering and resonating corridors." Self Storage is open between 4 April-7 May at Acorn Storage Centre, located on the eastern side of Wembley Stadium at the junction of First Way and South Way. Open Tuesday-Friday 7pm-9pm, Saturday 5pm-9pm, Sunday 12pm-5pm, admission £3.50. Ring 0171 494 3780 for details.

Disobey 13 April finds the Blast First club back at its usual venue (Upstairs at The Garage in North London, £6) in a regular slot for more mischievous business in 1995. This month sees the appearance of Jini Tenor from Finland's Sahko Recordings, and a sinewave-surfing set from label supergroup Panasonic (soon to release a CD for Blast First). The Sahko package then moves on to entertain Edinburgh's Pure Club (14) and Glasgow's Sonora (16). Meanwhile, Disobey/Blast First performing artists Caspar Brötzmann Massaker bring their apocalyptic guitar primitivism to London Garage (26, £4, 0171 607 1818). Finally, a regular Disobey slot in Manchester is in the offing: watch this space. Hotline for all Disobey events (note new number) 0181 960 9529.

Electronic Lounge The rammed but easygoing watering hole for Electronic's telematic nomads, modern primitives and Techno renegades celebrates its first birthday, with surprise guest DJs, on 4 April at London's ICA bar, 8pm-Tam, £1.50, details on 0171 498 3032.

Nyman On The South Bank Festival of music and film relating to buzzy UK minimalist now heading into lush orchestral zones. Joined by virtually all the musicians, ensembles and singers associated with his music, this season (7-29 April) offers a comprehensive survey of Nyman's career to date, tying in with the release of his 1970s book *Experimental Music*. Includes a marathon screening of Nyman-scored Peter Greenaway films (7 April, 9pm-6.30am), Nyman Band meets

Orquesta Andalus De Tetuan (8, 8pm), Piano Concerto (13, 7.30pm), Chamber Music (21, 7.45pm), Harpsichord Concerto, Cello Songs, etc (29, 8pm). Ticket prices vary, although a special pass to all events is available for £50. Details from the Box Office on 0171 928 8800.

Sunday Service Leeds's Cafe Plex is the setting for live and vinyl dub, Ambient, and space rock sounds, kicking off with a set from Divine Soma Experience (2 April), followed by DJ Tony Morley (9), The Egg (16), Swordfish (23) and live dub from i'N Oneness and Roots Ting (30). The club has visuals, bar and board games, and opens on Sundays between 7-11pm.



PHOTO: BRIAN ANDERSON

The Club Room New weekly London venue (at the Queen's Arms, Donegal Street) for spontaneous, improvised music, especially involving acoustic/electronic collaborations. This month's inaugural line-up is as follows: acoustic/electric guitar battle between John Russell



and Dave Draper (whose brilliant Invisible String Quartet CD *Entonic* is out now on Slam), Germany's Alexander Frangenheim keeps score on bass (6 April). Sax/samplers/loop toy-shaking anarchy from Mike Walter, Richard Sanderson, John Russell, Thomas Lehn and Frangenheim (13). Also, John Bisset/Lester Moses (20), Tickleish win violinist Phil Durrant, bassist Kev Hopper and others (27). Price of

entry is \$4/2 SD, rmg D171 737 \$660 for details

The Big Chill What finer way to spend Easter Sunday than horizontal in the hallowed environment of North London's Union Chapel, together with the capital's most receptive musical crowd, at The Big Chill? This month's featured beats, jams and textures include a Mo Wax session led by label honcho James

Lavelle, Nirx Tune rhythmist Funk Porcra, rumbblings from Germany's Deep Space Network, surveillance in dub from Scanner, Inky Blackness, Slowly, Rockitt from Ambient Soho, DJ Unknown from Sonora and more. If your ears need a rest, try the sideshows: the new Big Chill Bookstore, aerial gymnastics by Angels Of Disorder, free internet access courtesy of State 51, massage, plentiful food and drink. 16 April, 3pm-midnight, £7/£5 (rmg D171 281 8106 to find out about the new membership scheme and for all other queries)

British Music Now Oliver Krussen conducts as The BBC Symphony Orchestra play out their choice of leading-edge British composition over a long weekend at London's Barbican. 21 April: Robin Holloway's *Fantasy Pleas* and *Domination Of Black 22*. Colin Matthews chamber music, and two works by newcomer Julian Anderson. 23: Knotty expanses by Mark-Anthony Turnage, and Oliver

Krussen's *Trotych* and fantasy opera *Where The Wild Things Are*, based on the scary kids' book by Maurice Sendak. All concerts begin at 6.30pm, tickets £10/£5, Box Office D171 638 8891.

Musical Exhibits *Memory Slip* by Osvaldo Maciel, at London's Museum Of Installation (33 Great Sutton Street, EC1), D171 253 0802, until 8 April, foregrounds the sense of smell above that of sight. As well as a skilful of pine-scented liquid, the show includes an audio work, *The Sound Of Smell*, a recording of pine needles being mechanically chopped and ground up for the length of time it took to fill the sealed room with their scent (the results are available on a 3" CD accompanying the exhibition). Meanwhile, at the Montage Gallery in Derby (D1332 295858), George Millward provides electro-soundscape accompaniment to Brian McCleave's *Transmission* *Pinnakes* photography, centred around ideas of the construction and decay of machinery and communication networks.

Live In Brief

Reservoir New Music ensemble play Iannis Xenakis, Carl Stalling and Erik Satie, 28 April at London Conway Hall, 7.30pm, £5 (D181 292 6484)

Rapun Ex-zooz/Trance turned Fourth World loopologist appears live at Glasgow Sonora, plus DJ Unknown. 9 April, 8.30pm-midnight, £2 SD, info D141 339 3322

Transient Vs Resident Martin Archer's abrasive electronic mavericks live at Northampton Shaps (5 April) and Sheffield Grapes (6). Enquiries on D114 266 7180

Zion Train Dub massive vibrating North London's Out Club to the roots. 30 March, The Dome, 9pm-2.30am, D181 961 5637

Other Sounds Norwich Improv centre features Chris Burn, John Butcher, Jim Denley and Matt Hutchinson in quartet. 8 April at Norwich King Of Hearts, 8pm, £5/£3. Info on D1603 766129

Andy Visser/Barnaby Oliver Live music for computers and humans. *Homage To Wurt*,

"Simultaneous Sneezing", etc, played on IRCAM equipment. Brighton University, 20 April, 8pm, info D1273 652501

Jazz Rumours Long-running free music haven every Sunday at North London's Vortex (D171 254 6516). This month's scream-ups courtesy of Mark Hewing/Hugh Hopper Quartet (2 April), Elton Dean/Howard Riley Quartet (9), Roberto Bellatalla with Louis Moholo, Claude Deppa and Paul Dunnill (16), Lol Coxhill with Chris Burn, Nick Coudry and Adam Bohmen (23), Alan Wilkinson/Svein Nobs/Marco Mattos (30). Entrance is £4/£3

Willem Breuker/Billy Jenkins Oblique Dutch/British virtuoso pool resources at London Purcell Room. 1 April, 7.30pm, £7 SD, D171 928 8800

Identical Ex-Coil member shunts Sun Ra up against Residents-style anarchy, Richard Sanderson plays toys with throat singer Michael Ormiston. Support from Improv rockers 46,000 Fakes. 5 April at London Red Rose Club, 8pm, £3/£2, D171 263 7265

The Orb Alex Paterson's crew have added an extra London date to their sell-out tour, at the Forum on 8 April, 10pm-6am, £15. Support from DJ Lewis, Bandulu and special guests



Digital Slam A two day event billed as the first live interactive link-up between audiences, musicians and speakers across the Atlantic takes place this month at London's ICA and New York's The Kitchen. The event will attempt to reconcile notions of Afrocentrism to the digital age. For the first of two sessions, 'Call And Response' (21 April), Tony Remy, MC Melli 'O', Urban Poets Society, Maika B and Pure D-Lite (London) and

sounding off



BUTTO ANDSEN FOR POLARIS

Nuyorican Poets, DJ Spooky and others (NYC), will conduct two-way poetry and musical slams in realtime with the aid of fibre-optic cables and the World Wide Web. On the second day (22), Paul Gilroy (in London) and Greg Tate (in New York) engage in an on-line conference, with audiences on

both continents able to communicate with each other over the network. Tickets for the ICA events are £10/£8 (Friday) and £6/£4 (Saturday). Box Office 0171 930 3647

Certain Ants Noisy Leeds Terrence Club favourites entertain a

home crowd (21 April, 01532 302460), then crawl on to Luton 33 Arts Centre (26, 01582 419584) and Sheffield Other Music (30, 0114 268 5753).

Theory Of Evolution

Live business from Global Communication and friends Jac, Steeper and playful samplert Wish Mountain Plays, coinciding with the release of a compilation album (*The Theory Of Evolution*) on Warp. Glasgow Arches (8 April), Manchester Sankkey's Soap (21), London Raw Club (26), Sheffield Music Factory (28)

Eargasm

Nottingham Ambient club presents local textuologists Neil and Tony Global (12 April) and Thrash/Kris Weston of The Orb (26) At Bellamy's (0115 947 5823), 8-11 30pm, prices between £3-£150

Megatropolis

The club with feelgood factor sets off on its first regional tour, and joining the caravan will be Zen Train, Astrakias, Transcendental Love Machine, Space and Salt Tank. Dates as follows: Manchester Hacienda (15 April), Cardiff Hippo Club (27), Brighton Sussex University (28), Swansea University (29), and Newcastle University (10 May). Ring 0171 713 5563 for details.

Dorado Night

Conscience-inden acoustic jazz Junglists O'Note and labelmates Outside Jon Jhelisa and Slowly, fresh back from their European tour. 12 April, London Astoria 2, 8pm, £10.50

Waldron/Haslam

Pianist Mali and baritone saxophonist George follow their acclaimed 1994 self-titled CD with selected UK appearances: Huddersfield Springfield Park Hotel (18 April, 01484 607788); London Vortex (21-22, 0171 254 6516); and Oxford Holywell Room (23, 01235 529012)

Fathom

A monthly voyage into the uncharted waters of spaced-out jazz dub at this new clubspace APE from Dorado Records, Matt Munday (Groove Recordings) and Rob Wood

Television & Radio

Sound On Film

(BBC2, 10-13 April, 11 15pm) Close collaborations between composers and directors produce these innovative 30 minute audio-visual explorations. Music by Paul Enghyby, Kevin Volans, Peco Pena and James Dillon

Mixing It

(Radio 3, Mondays 10.45-11 30pm) Mark Russell and Robert Sandall host essential, We-on-air musical smorgasbord

Here And Now

(Radio 3, Fridays from 28 April, times vary) New magazine programme centred on contemporary music (replacing *Musical In Our Time* and *Midnight Oil*). Robert Ziegler and Sarah Walker present live recordings, studio discussions, festival location reports and more

Even Parker's 50th Birthday

Concert (Radio 3, 1 April 11 25pm-1am) Recorded in April 1994 at London's Originals

John Stevens Tribute Concert

(Radio 3, 15 April 11pm-1am) Friends and ex-colleagues pay their last respects to the late drummer in January this year with performances of Stevens's *Blue* and *The Blessing Light*

Alpha Waves

(Kiss 102, Saturdays 4-6am) Stuart James lays down a seamless dawn-chorus mix, from Thomas Koner to Wagon Christ to Loop Guru and beyond

OJ at South London's Club 9, 29 April, 9pm-3am, £5 before 10 30pm, £6 after

State 51 Please note that the screen-grab illustration accompanying our multimedia column (this issue, page 73) contains State 51's old internet address. The correct address is the one that appears in the text of the accompanying article □

Emerging Light

Festival of the music of Arvo Part and Estonia, and related sounds, at London's South Bank, running from 22 April-12 May. Quality performers such as The Hilgard Ensemble, London Sinfonietta, Roger Norrington, Christopher Bowers-Broadbent, Vilnius New Music Ensemble, and many more, programme key Part works including *Tabula Rasa* (24), *Symphony No 3* (27), *Hognokor* (15 May), and *Passeo* (12), alongside contemporaries Erkki-Sven Turi, Veijo Tormes, and Petrus Vasks. Ticket prices and times vary. Contact the Box Office on 0171 928 8800 for full details

ARVO PART TICKET OFFER

On 29 April, as part of the Emerging Light festival, The Hilgard Ensemble perform a two-part concert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall making the connection between 14th and 15th century Baltic music and that of Part and his contemporaries. The first half features the Early Music, the second includes Veijo Tormes's *Navigato Cantans* and Kullervo's *Message*, a newly commissioned work by Petrus Vasks, Petrus Plakide's *Ave Maria Stella*, and Part's *Motette* and *Sobor Mater*. **We have FIVE PAIRS OF TICKETS for this event to give away. PLUS five copies of the new Petrus Vasks CD on Conifer Records.** To win one of these packages, simply tell us what 'Tabula Rasa' means. Send your answer on a postcard, along with your name, address and daytime phone number, to Arvo Part Commission, The Wire, 45-46 Poland Street, London W1V 3QF. Closing date: 12 April 1995. Those of you not lucky enough to win tickets can still claim ten per cent off tickets for the same concert by phoning the Box Office and quoting 'The Wire Emerging Light Offer'.



Arvo Part

global gear

A survey of sounds from around the planet. This month. . .

Paris

Paris is a city of opposites, where punk cobwebs with African music, rap with jungle, and jazz with the avant garde. Not only is it a breeding ground for esoteric experimentation, it's also a favourite port of call for long-established musicians. Take John Cale, for instance. A solitary figure seated at a synthesizer to the left of an enormous screen, he recently performed his score for Tod Browning's silent film classic *The Unknown*, a cynical tale of a man who cuts off his arms for love, at the Cinéma Film Festival (British audiences will be able to see/hear it at London's South Bank in October). The soundtrack was a dark blend of tense, poignant atmospheres and distant voices — TS Eliot, Ezra Pound, Winston Churchill. "My arm wasn't just to write music, but to use voices, effects and noises. I wanted to convey a feeling of claustrophobia," Cale explained during a question-and-answer session with the audience. "My first experience of cinema was at the Factory with Andy Warhol. He used to say that there didn't have to be a connection between a film and its soundtrack, so you were free to express yourself any way you wanted." Cale seems to be carving out a niche for himself in film music, particularly in France: he has already composed the soundtracks for several French films and has just completed another one, for piano and string quartet.

Recently, The Art Ensemble Of Chicago performed here. It was a homecoming of sorts: in the late 60s the group lived and worked in Paris alongside other exiles from Afro-America's free jazz fraternity. Although they no longer amaze audiences the way they used to, the show was packed. Schoolteachers even brought along their classes, explaining to their fidgety pupils the group's historical significance in relation to the city's cultural landscape. The German band Stein, featuring Einstürzende Neubauten's FM Einheit, were also in town. Einheit's performance was the best thing about the set, which reached its climax during the tense, suspenseful moments when he proceeded to coax strange noises out of a supermarket trolley.

Paris has become a nexus for fascinating avant garde experiments. Composer Nicolas (no Y!) Frieze has just reached the end of his four-month sojourn in a suburban hospital four months spent recording and analysing the day-to-day sounds of the theatres and wards and composing a piece of music which was performed on the premises by 150 people, including

staff, patients and professional musicians. A former pupil of musique concrète pioneer Pierre Schaeffer, Frieze has developed an idiosyncratic, socially-oriented approach to contemporary music. His aim is to get people to listen to the day-to-day sounds around them. "I want to show that we are responsible for these sounds because they are a reflection of the way we live in society. Once you start listening to them, you can start to change them," suggested the man who organized, composed and conducted the seminal *Concert For Train Engines* in a Paris railway station a few years back.

At the edge of the city, in a huge disused cold store that has been turned into artists' workshops, sound-sculptor Jacques Rémus is hard at work on his musical robots. He has been building these outdoor futuristic machines for over ten years. His 12-armed drummers and many-fingered keyboard players sound like the real thing, as do his equally impressive string, percussion and woodwind units. Monitored by a remote-controlled MIDI device, which sets in motion their pistons and gears, these highly intricate machines can play together as an orchestra or on their own. The robots will be on display in Lyon at the end of March, plucking strings and pressing down keys as they perform compositions by Bach, Ligeti and Rémus himself.

Meanwhile, Ramuntcho Mailla is busy setting up his new UNPROD record label. The producer of two albums by Brian Gysin, Ramuntcho is currently working on a long-term project with Gysin's one-time collaborator William Burroughs. His esoteric background may well account for his choice of artists one of the first albums to be released on the label consists of two audiopoems by Henri Chopin, along with a short extract from one of them that has been subjected to timesretching and other digital sound processing by composer Marc Battier. For those who have never heard (of) Henri Chopin, his audiopoems consist of long series of clicking noises.

Extraordinary things are also happening at IRCAM (Institute For Research And Coordinator Into Acoustics/Music). Even this highly serious government-funded institution is having a go at film music, in the person of Argentinian composer Martin Matalon. Matalon has just completed a score for the new



John Cale

restored version of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, to be performed in Paris in May. Featuring 17 instruments that include a harp and an electric guitar, as well as a sizeable amount of electronic equipment, it was composed in IRCAM's studios, drawing on computerized sound modeling techniques.

While on the subject of sound modeling, years of research in IRCAM's myriad studios have produced a software called *Modalsys* that breathes life into virtual instruments by means of physical modeling. This software can create the sound of 14-metre long violins, or Chinese gongs that measure 200 metres in diameter, or any other non-existent instrument you care to mention. For the moment, the software doesn't operate in real time, so it is best adapted to studio work or sampling. But Edmund Campion used *Modalsys* to add the sound of 50 drums to an 11 minute piece of music he performed in Paris in January.

Modalsys is only now being made available to composers, but expect to hear many impossible sonic reverberations from the direction of Paris in the near future. **RANHA KHAZANI**

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Todd Levin

At the summer 1994 recording sessions at London's Abbey Road Studios for his CD *De Luxe*, Todd himself is already sporting the baseball cap advertising his next project: a video opera with Philip Glass. The 32-year-old, New York-based composer, who released a self-titled CD on Glass's Private Music in 1992, balances keen musical attention with a disregard for the classical composer's three "D's": dignity, deference and distance.

De Luxe is released by the Mercedes-Benz of classical labels, Deutsche Grammophon, but if you're coming on board, hang up your sanity on the yellow canotches. Of the five large-scale orchestral pieces on display, four are driven by a backbeat derived from 4/4 Techno, while on the fifth, *Sweet*, The London Symphony Orchestra chirps benignly in the background while Todd and mezzo Mary

Nesanger chaw over childhood memories. On the longest piece, entitled *Todd Levin*, the composer mouths off a resume of the (mal)contents of his mind: uncharitable thoughts about contemporary music's loss of bottle. These he amplifies to me, a day after completing the recording.

"Classical music's up for grabs, and I'm determined to be a leader. There's shame and/or guilt about associating with popular culture, you're sort of taught it's bad. If you embrace this banality and shed yourself of the shame and guilt, then you can start to do what every composer needs to do, which is to make the music a more powerful thing in the everyday lives of people. If they don't, then it's almost like sex without love."

However winworthy "Techno/orchestral crossover" might sound, in practice the scale and sonorities of the orchestra, forced to operate at unaccustomed velocities, reach arresting new extremes. "I'm trying to engender mobility between music on the highest aesthetic level, full of provocative engagements with people, and ideas that don't start so far above people's heads that they feel it's threatening to them. I'm not talking about pandering or crossing over, because the only thing that's crossing over are audiences."

The artists who survive the future will be the great negotiators, those whose music lives as precarious an existence as their own. This is the premise of Todd Levin. "It has to be me reading it, and every time the piece is performed, the text will be different because the things in my life are going to change."



The only truly valid max will be the one I do before I die, because I will have reached equilibrium and so will the piece, it will have frozen optically because the creator has. That will be the approved version."

Todd hopes to counter some of the classical world's aloofness. "I like the business and finance world. I think there's a lot to be learned from it. And I'm not just talking nuts and bolts, I'm talking aesthetics." **BOB YOUNG** *De Luxe* is out now on Deutsche Grammophon (through Polygram). A 12" EP of remixes by Mark "Vaporwave" Gage, also on D.G., is scheduled for May.



Organum

Listening to David Jackman's 13-year-old Organum project, you can't help feeling something primal is being tapped. As Jackman himself has observed, "Organum music came out sounding really ancient, like something from the very beginning of music making." In an age of comparative religion and the Supermarket of the Soul, the appeal of an undogmatic spiritual music with a certain sense of purity and ritualistic intensity is not insignificant.

"People used to write to me convinced that I was into some sort of mysticism, Gnosticism, God-knows-what-ever-ism," says Jackman. "That's what people latched onto in the music. It was never an interest of mine."

Certain formative musical influences are apparent, however, in Organum's chaotic, metallic, dronescapes. Jackman discovered La Monte Young's verbal scores when he was at art college in the 60s and would regularly attend weekly concerts by legendary noise improvisers AMM. He also had a love of Tibetan ritual music, and organum—an early, droning form of sacred vocal music. These musical influences blended with the chorus of his environment, including the sound of his rearing motorbike and the harsh sonorities of the rail system. "One place I used to live, I could hear the freight trains at night while I was lying in bed. I think those sounds—like squealings and wheel flanges on rails as they go round a curve—got buried in my brain. Years later when I was listening to the Organum stuff, those sounds or something like them made their presence felt in the music."

Jackman started making music when he joined The Scratch Orchestra in 1969. Like many 50 members, he had no formal musical training—the only compositional

tools he had at his disposal were simple graphic scores or verbal instructions. Although Jackman now works predominantly in the studio, the source material for the title track of the latest Organum release—the excellent *Viel Of Tears*—was recorded in a disused British Rail tunnel (with Morphogues's Michael Prime). "It was January-ish, absolutely freezing, wet and pitch black. The walls of the tunnel were pouring with water. We had a candle each and were spaced out about 200 yards apart. All we could see were these pin-pricks of light. We got out as soon as the tape ran out."

The CD also includes contributions from two of the new generation of drone enthusiasts, Jim O'Rourke and Mark Robert Hampson, combining with Jackman's bowed metals, home-made bamboo flutes and shakuhachi.

Since 1981, Jackman has released some 24 recordings, most of them in very small editions (50, 133, maximum to date 1200), sometimes only available by mail and scattered around the globe on a multitude of small independent labels. Another factor which makes Jackman's work so collectable is that all of it is packaged in his own artwork—charismatic collages rendered in the tradition of Max Ernst. "Those early works were very laborious. There was one album cover, *Vacant Lights*, that took me six months to do. Now I'm more inclined to deal in humour. With *Viel Of Tears* [pictured left], I really had fun doing that." **PAUL ENGLAND** *Viel Of Tears* is out now on Matchless (through Impetus).

MC 900 Ft Jesus

Texas Mark Griffin, aka MC 900 Ft Jesus, was a precocious child, constantly moving from house to house. Despite that MC prefix, his measured vocal delivery has little to do with HipHop's syllabic gymnastics. He is closer to the oral poets of Henry Rollins and related to the literary traditions of Slick Star and Bukowski-Funk. His music is a dark and sonic fusion of electronic sonorities, jazzy textures and house-tinged R&B. His latest work, *One Step Ahead Of The Spider*, sees him opening up his previously single-handed work to the input of other musicians, including Living Color's Vernon Reid.

After emerging from Dallas University with a music degree, Griffin bummed around America's deep south, playing in clubs, working a residency at a fairground as well as doing session work (trumpet is his main instrument) and serving in a specialist record store. He became disillusioned with the limited possibilities offered by session work when he began to play electronic dance music and HipHop that had begun flooding into the record shop circa 1985.

"Around that time," he says in his Texas drawl, "I bought myself a Moog — House music was starting out, Belgian New Beat, and also HipHop was starting to get interesting. Run-DMC and Public Enemy was the best rap stuff that I liked. At the time I didn't know what the hell I was doing with my life but looking back on it I was

searching for some sort of creative control. It gradually dawned on me that here were all these guys making these 12" singles and it's basically one or two people in a room with a sampler and a sequencer. I guess what was impressing me about it was that it was real cheap to do but you could get some really cool music out of it and you'd be in control of your whole thing. Eventually I realised that's what I wanted to do. The first MC 900 Ft Jesus record was an EP. I saved up my money and put it out myself while I was working at the store."

This led to a record deal with Network and his first album, *Hell With The Lid Off* (1990) followed by another, *Welcome To My Dream* (1991). His latest is released by American Recordings.

"My music started off from this club music point of departure, predominantly related to rap, and then it evolved to all that being encoded by this live jazzy sound. It's a weird mix of music. Sometimes you alienate some of the audience. People liked the industrial aspect of the first album but it was virtually gone on the second and I read that people didn't like that and now on this third album the dance club aspect has been toned down or been cut out."

MARK BARNES *One Step Ahead Of The Spider* out now on American Recordings (for more on MC 900 Ft Jesus see page 10)



Joe Henderson

Joe Henderson is evolving. In recent years, he has been involved in an ongoing and exquisite refinement of a unique and highly developed jazz vernacular that results from over 40 years spent playing the tenor saxophone. Playing less and playing it quieter, his performances on such recent records as *Lush Life* and *So Near, So Far* (both Verve) remain electrifying.



brimming with hair-raising harmonic twists and rhythmic turns. His latest release, *Double Rainbow*, is a collection of pieces by the Brazilian composer Antonio Carlos Jobim, who died only recently. Born out of a 1994 New York collaboration, the record was originally to have involved Jobim himself, who had kept his illness largely a secret from those around him. Eventually, it was made using two groups, one featuring Herbie Hancock, Christian McBride and Jack DeJohnette, the other involving a more orthodox Brazilian section. Throughout, Henderson's playing is arresting, beautiful and intelligent, winging the most out of the record's reconfigured settings. Compared to the records he was making for the Blue Note label during the mid-60s, which were often halting in their emotional impact, the music on *Double Rainbow* is informed more by qualities of stillness and quietude.

"I think my playing reflects my personality — I mean I don't think I could play different than I am," he says. "And this session allowed me to break out of that thing where there are notes flying out all over the place and be a little gentler — I guess you could say a kinder sort of Joe."

As far as current, reductionist versions of jazz history are concerned, Henderson's career stopped somewhere around 1966 (when he left Blue Note), only resurfacing two decades later with his incendiary *State Of The Tenor* albums. Towards the end of last

year, however, the Milestone label issued a sprawling eight CD box set — *The Milestone Years* — which documented the recordings Henderson made for the label between 1967 and 76. And suddenly, whole tracts of vivid, experimental fusions, which previously were practically just a rumour, were cast back into the light. This was music that tapped into the same ideas of generic blending, jazz/R&B crossovers and Afrocentric notions of mysticism and Blackness that fermented in the hot-house climate of 70s records by Miles Davis, Alice Coltrane, Herbie Hancock, Julian Priester, James 'Blood' Ulmer and others.

"I think we all started there, with R&B," he says now, somewhat underwhelmingly. "I had been with Blood, Sweet And Tears, and I had several things that I had wanted to do with Sweet that was in that zone, but since I wasn't there longer than six months I didn't get a chance to try them out. So when I met Ulmer, he seemed to be the right person to help bring out my attempts at making inroads into that zone. But I guess my reputation preceded me, because although the musicians that I got were specialists in making those kinds of records, they no longer had the opportunity to play jazz and this is something that I guess they missed. So when I got them together to do my rock date, I was thinking, man, they're playing too much jazz!" **LINTON CHESWICK** *Double Rainbow* is out now on Polygram/Verve. The Milestone Years is available through Ace.

Oval

"There can't be any revolution, not just in music, but within the whole information society. Sabotage is the only thing you can do if you want to display a critical position — it's the only thing that's left." Thus says Markus Popp, one third of the German trio Oval.

Oval have been extant for about two years now and their rigorous approach to electronic music has produced two astonishing albums — last year's *Systemisch* and the newly released *94 Diskont* — full of complex, shifting and highly evocative patterns of clicks, drones, glitches and unidentifiable sounds. A key part of the group's creative process involves painting CDs, playing them back and recording the resulting distressed sounds as raw material, then digitally editing them.

"It is to oppose the limitations of the CD medium," Popp says over the phone from his Berlin home, "and to display disobedience towards sound synthesis — not to use the factory sound of the manufacturers." The CD has not exclusively been our means of expressing sound but it was the last territory from which something different might be brought in, and in an abstract way. The theme has been to work out the limitations of the set up you're in — the 'blind spot' of music as it is supposed to be according to the hardware manufacturer.

"The hardest thing is to recontextualise these sounds



as music. Because every little slip, every little noise and loop and fragment and fracture — it's not music, you know. The *94 Diskont* album often had 30 different tracks or more in the sequencer and the main task is to make it into music after all."

Oval are "connected to" Berlin's artistic and political undergrounds, appearing in clubs and setting up installations with their mobile sound system containing 128 speakers ("They are very small"). "We've tried various opportunities to contextualise ourselves," Popp explains. "We've tried art exhibitions, we're appearing at an Ambient festival in Munich. We have no connection to whoever in this field — Techno as well as art — we go out there and see what happens."

So what is Oval? "Oval is certainly not a band and

certainly not an artistic project — I don't know, a 'small club' or something... It's really hard work to do this sort of music and there's no fun in it at all. And there is no enthusiasm. And we're not music lovers."

So why choose to do music at all, if it's such a chore? "Music is a good medium to transport our views. We like to have our stuff as an input into a digital discourse where you exchange positions and where you can exchange views through the medium of music. We could easily have put out massively complicated texts and manifestos and this is very uncool. Oval's music should be cool after all." **DAVE MORRISON** *94 Diskont* is released this month on *Mike Plateaux* (through *SRO*). A version album featuring remixes by *Scanner*, *Jim O'Rourke* and others is also imminent.



Hector Zazou

Following on from his last album, *Sahora Blue*, French composer/producer Hector Zazou is back in the desert. This time, the locations — in as much as locations have ever been important — are the ice fields of the northern hemisphere. "My fascination with the Arctic is completely disconnected from reality," says Zazou. He speaks about a movie that showed an image of an igloo, bathed in a blue light: strange, fantastic images of the snows as a *tobias rasa*. "The Arctic is still unknown to us. It is the real place for dreams."

The collision, perhaps the osmosis, between the real and the ethereal occupies an interesting place in Zazou's music. Like *Sahora Blue*, a setting of Rimbaud poems, and its predecessor, *Les Nouvelles Polyphonies Corse*, an album of traditional Corsican material, his new album, *Chansons Des Mers Froides* (*Songs Of The Cold Seas*), is an obliquely composed record. Using mostly extant Northern folk forms ("Traditional songs have survived by a natural selection, they are very strong"), Zazou adds arrangements, atmospheric electronic effects and a specific ambience. The 11 songs, researched and recorded over three years, shimmer with a spacious sound and seductive presence.

In this, Zazou has been greatly aided by the quality of his contributors. There are some extraordinary

original language songs from the Finnish vocal group *Värttinä* and the Japan-based Hokkaido singer, *Tokiko Kato*, alongside Inuit chants. More familiar (to Western ears) singers also feature. Björk contributes a setting of a traditional Icelandic song, "Visur Vatnsenda-Rösu", it's a piece of stark, icy beauty. Jane Siberry, Suzanne Vega and John Cale are also present, so, too, is punk's original ice maiden, *Siouxsie Sioux*. Instrumentalists include *The Balinese Quartet*, as well as Harold Budd and Barbara Gogan, two artists due to feature on forthcoming Zazou-touched albums.

The record's rather stratospheric reach owes something to the fact that all the singers (with the exception of Cale) are female. "I think women are the only human beings able to sing properly. There is something incomplete when a man sings. His voice is always related to the ground. Women's voices are angels' voices. I prefer to be attracted up."

There are people who will find the French-language commentary of the album's sleeve notes hard going, let alone deciphering the Icelandic, Gaelic, or Swedish lyrics. For such a word-based album, Zazou's take on the importance of understanding their meaning is paradoxical. "There are myths about the nature of the first language. One is that God talked to Adam, the first man, in music. It's not important to believe in God or the Bible, just to believe that the story exists. Go back to the Adam story. Music communicates by itself. Words only add, never subtract." **LOUISE GRAY** *Songs Of The Cold Seas* is out now on *Columbia*.

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Chicago's **Tortoise** are the latest group to explore the possibilities of mood music, imaginary soundtracks and pop dissonance. Interview by K Martin

slow motion studies

Abstract and rarefied, the sound of the Chicago group Tortoise owes little to the recent musical initiatives of its native city, be they Wax Trax or the upwardly mobile rock produced by Smashing Pumpkins and Urge Overkill. Instead, the group inhabits Chicago's overlooked underground domain, where fellow tragédies include Steve Albini's Shellac, Gaster Del Sol and Jim O'Rourke's brise glace. "We're all part of the same musical community," enthuses the group's co-founder Doug McCombs. "We're all trying to do something different. A lot of ideas are being exchanged."

Originally formed in 1989 as a studio based duo, Tortoise, now a self-styled "loose conglomeration," recently released a transient, self-titled debut album. A timeless voyage through pop dissonance, its analogue synth flow and rhythmic agility reaches out far beyond their home city's restrictive, media-tagged limits. From "Ry Cooder," which could be The Modern Jazz Quartet covering "Bat Chain Puller," to "Night Air," where Augustus Pablo inhabits P.L.'s skeletal dub, their psychedelic progressions sound simultaneously aged and futuristic.

"I think a lot of what we do is pastoral in a way," suggests McCombs, perhaps referring to the way their nomadic atmospheres float high above the Windy City's skyscape. "But there's obviously not much of that in inner city Chicago. We all grew up in small towns. None of us are from Chicago."

Tortoise's music revels in weird time and deep space, jettisoning the shackles of 4/4 time signatures, while pushing the background to the fore and the lead to the rear. The group's producer John McVie, a current contributor to Red Krayola and Gaster Del Sol, sheds some light on their groove-heavy role reversal. "It's a matter of changing the perspective, changing how the instruments work in relation to one another, so you don't have this hierarchy which you have in traditional music." Unleashing congas, vibes or melodic to glaze over liquid motion, their music's lack of form reflects the 90s obsession with mood music. "I think it works well as background music," says McCombs. "I think you can sit down and concentrate on Tortoise, hearing all different things, or you can put it on while you're making the coffee."

Like many musicians working in HipHop, Ambient and Jungle, McCombs is drawn to the notion of the "imaginary soundtrack," its open forms and attendant potential for mood enhancement (witness the sustained suspense of "Flyrod," a distant relation to Morricone's "As A Judgement"). "I think that Barry Adamson's *Poss Side Story* was a great record. That was a great idea, having a soundtrack with no movie. I like things that create moods more and more. I like those things more than I like regular songs. Movies create moods and books create mood. I think that's definitely what we're doing."

Virtually instrumental, Tortoise's oblique mood enhancements, as mapped by minor key changes, are another indication of how compelling music can surface from the Ambient immersion tank. Mirroring the group's floating membership, all direction is inferred and shape proves to be subjective. However, during a recent live performance in London, the group's hypnotic pulse (derived from a twin bassline drum line up) and delicate structures became more obvious, as if enacting an obscure ritual, the significance of which was private. "Live, we use the structure that exists, while trying to be free within that framework, varying things from night to night, to keep them fresh. We want it to flow," says McCombs.

Listen to Tortoise alongside brise glace's recent *When In Vantaz*, Labradford's forthcoming *A Stable Reference*, Jessamine's *Don't You Know That Yet* and Gaster Del Sol's hybridisation of Morton Feldman and *Trout Mask Replica* on *Crook, Crook, Or Fly*, it appears that there's a dissident revolt emerging against the alternative orthodoxy that characterises America's new punk mainstream.

"When Tortoise began, Grunge hadn't even become a viable commodity," observes McCombs. "There was a lot of things in my past which I considered punk rock, which weren't aggressive or didn't feature loud guitar. Everybody in the group had only been involved with guitar-based rock bands, most of which were on the loud side. Johnny and I wanted to do something a little different. Maybe a little quieter."

Inspired as much by Lee Perry as Gang Of Four, Tortoise stand in opposition to the recent Technophobic critiques of alternative US rock, a position underlined by producer McVie. "There are things on the album that are extremely studio orientated, [that] were formed in the studio. The studio really informs the way we play live."

1994 was the year that notions of populist (as opposed to avant garde) experimentation, cross-fertilisation and mass border crossings went overground. The trend continues in the early months of 1995, with Jim O'Rourke reuniting Air Liquide associates Oval, ex-Nurse With Wound collaborator Rob Hight pushing *Omn* Two ever further into the virtual Jungle, and post-rockers Bark Psychosis utilising breakbeats on the *Boomerang* project. Accordingly, perhaps we'll see Tortoise's space rock in the collections of both Dub Club regulars and mood music aficionados, where it deserves to be. □ Tortoise is out now on *City Slang* (through RHM/Pinnacle). Two new singles by the group are also available: "Why We Fight" (Soul Static Sound, through SRC) and "Garners" (Duophonic, through RHM/Pinnacle).



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Drawing on esoteric notions of alchemy and magick, the music of **Coil** maps a hidden world of altered perspectives and arcane practices. Story by John Everall

In an age of mercurial genre-crossings and mongrel hybrids, Coil remain pure, uncontaminated, pursuing a singular vision in documenting an unconventional, yet enormously wild, world view. "Certain tracks on certain Coil records are designed to trigger altered states, whether this happens or not is to some extent up to the listener," states the group's John Balance, outlining one of Coil's fundamental concerns: "Without wishing to sound pompous, we want to make sacred music. I don't mean something that assumes Messianic proportions or delusions, but I think all good music should be an attempt to change people's mind-sets."

Balance comprises one third of Coil (the other members being ex-Throbbing Gristle agitator Peter "Sleazy" Christopherson and recent addition Dean McCowall) and is eager to pursue this subject: "I would regard some of La Monte Young's music as sacred. Beethoven also, in an esoteric sense. I think his music has a very powerful shamanic quality to it. Music conceived as pure entertainment I do have a problem with, but then again certain music which is perceived as pure entertainment I would regard as having those qualities; for instance, Martin Denny. Also Acid House, because like the Butthole Surfers at their best, it took you to a point of brilliant madness."

For over a decade Coil have warped, twisted and transmitted sound in a manner pertinent to their immersion in the world of esoteric ideas. On 1985's *Scatology*, the inspiration was explicitly alchemical theories: "Scatology contained numerous references to the alchemical process," says Balance. "I'm obsessed with the idea of turning base matter into gold, transmuting base materials, ie raw sound, into something else — the gold in the process. We recorded some rather peculiar practices which we then transformed and manipulated in accordance with our specific aims."

The idea of an alchemy of sound is an area they plan to re-explore for their forthcoming album on Trent Reznor's Nothing label, *Bookworms*.

"With *Bookworms* we're returning to a lot of our original ideas and intentions. On recent material we've used synths a great deal, but this time we want to go out and make recordings in the wild and process them, twisting them around."

Coil's desire to process, twist and warp their sonic content has led to the development of what they term, in homage to Occult artist Susan Osman Spare, *Sideral Sound*. "Obviously the term sideral relates to stars, but also through wordplay to looking at reality sideways, from a new angle or perspective. So as Spare twisted images in space, we adopt a similar process with sound. We've always been into sonic deviation and experimentation."

Coil's techniques of sound transfiguration adumbrate certain developments in post-Techno and the isolationist end of the Ambient spectrum. This is now being acknowledged, if somewhat belatedly. The group's influence is readily detectable in the work of Scanner (leaving dropping on mundane conversations was pursued by Sleazy back in his TG days), several of the 'Isolationists' as well as Autechre (who have consistently namechecked Coil of late). "There are some interesting connections developing," says Balance, referring to the group's forthcoming collaborations with Autechre, Atom Heart, Bill Laswell and Tetsu Inoue.

In the meantime, Coil have been working with William Burroughs. "We worked with William on a track for *Bookworms*. What interests me about William is his mind, not the sound of his voice. So that is what we wanted to capture. When we were working on the Ministry video 'Just One Far' (directed by Coil and featuring Burroughs) we asked him to create certain

Secret Domain was an instance of this, on that album we were pushing things too far, both mentally and physically. Both myself and Stephen Thrower (ex-Coil member) started seeing spectral presences in the studio, which looked like the mummified figures of ancient kings and queens. After finishing that record I collapsed on the floor, not knowing who I was or where I was."

Coil's next release documents a variety of their esoteric interests. Entitled *The Sound Of Music*, it compiles the music they contributed to Derek Jarman's films *Journey To Awebury* and *Blue*, as well as the unreleased soundtrack to Clive Barker's *Hellraiser*. Also imminent is their first album as *ELP.H*, *Worship The Glitch*. "ELP.H is when we no longer recognize our presence in the music," explains Balance. "It's the idea of taking the dead spaces, the mistakes and extending them." □ *The Sound Of Music* and *Worship The Glitch* are due for release in the near future on Eskaton (through World Serpent).

obscure mechanics

key words and phrases for us. This material has a shamanic quality to it, really it is a magical spell. This is where we connect with William, he describes the invisible world, he documents the hidden mechanisms. This is what we also seek out: the secret mechanisms, the Occult, if you like, given that Occult simply means 'hidden'."

With so many artists currently flirting with Occult symbolism, grasping the shadow rather than the substance, it is heartening to see artists such as Coil, Bill Laswell, David Toop & Max Eastley, even Julian Cope exploring arcane knowledge with lucidity and intelligence. "I think the majority of people interested in the Occult are just confused," suggests Balance. "Those with a genuine interest have something valid to communicate. I think somebody like Julian Cope, in his Arch-Druid phase, has common interests with us, I like people who have a tendency to be hermetic, abrasive, out of step, but usually ahead of their time."

"I also have a great interest in the idea of sensory derangement being a path to illumination. We toyed with the idea of calling our next album *God Please Fuck My Mind For Good*, which is a quote from Beethoven where the double meaning appeals to me. Love's





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Arthur Russell died in obscurity of AIDS in 1992. Yet this New York composer was a true visionary, traversing dub, disco and minimalism and anticipating the 90s obsession with musical hybrids. David Toop pays tribute

Watching the electronic press kit which accompanies the release on Point Music of Arthur Russell's *Another Thought* album, I felt the genuine care devoted to a thorny PR problem: how to sell the music of a true iconoclast who died in obscurity? Philip Glass, David Byrne and Allen Ginsberg discuss, on camera, their relationships with Russell and their views on his importance. Yet here are three thoughtful, creative men who seem to lack any inside knowledge of the world in which Russell placed his art. So they measure his work by degrees of astonishment — Russell loved trashy pop music, he wanted to be a pop star, he moved through genre boundaries with uncommon fluidity. "This ain't no disco," Byrne once wrote, and Russell interpreted the line as a personal snub. For Arthur, the disco was a legitimate arena for discovery. Symptomatic of an intellectual disdain for disco, the name of the New York DJ Walter Gibbons, a regular and crucial collaborator with Russell, is absent from the Glass, Byrne, Ginsberg dialogue. My first impulse, then, on being asked to write about Arthur and his music, is to offer a latent, parallel view to the well-meaning posthumous music creation that accompanies *Another Thought*.

Some facts. Arthur Russell and Walter Gibbons both died in recent time with little to signal their passing

of them were minimal compositions played by such New York luminaries as Jon Gibson, Rhys Chatham, Garrett List and David Van Tieghem, others were early Garage disco landmarks played by The Ingram Brothers and similar unsung backroom technicians of dance. But those three 12" singles, plus a serene, spacious album from 1986 entitled *World Of Echo* (Rough Trade, now deleted), alone represented his mercenary talent. *Another Thought* has been compiled from a stockpile of uncompleted tapes. The songs reveal a move towards music that may have been more easily grasped by a wider public, but perhaps this is illusory, since the album sounds like unfinished work. Arthur struggled against time and the awful power of AIDS. Where he might have taken his music is unguessable.

I interviewed him once, by telephone, for *The Face*. Speaking with a halting, nervous delivery, Arthur began by telling me that he had studied Indian classical music at the Ali Akbar Khan school in San Francisco. "Cello is Ali Akbar Khan's favourite instrument," he said. Talk turned to a Russell composition called *Instrumentals*, started in 1973. "I spent most of my time working on that one piece," he told me. "If it was performed completely it would be 48 hours long. So I had decided that I was going to do that for the rest of my life. When you're a composer and you just do the same



past futurist

Alongside the dub masters of Jamaica and disco's red-hot king, Tom Moulton, Gibbons could be described as a pioneer of reconstructive dance mixes. His rerecords were raw and daring. When he collaborated with Arthur Russell, each seemed to push the other into impossible corners, jumping rather than gliding, exposing the bones of the music, emphasizing physicality and intuitive agility in preference to dance imperatives or financial lures. The singles they made together are unique: "Let's Go Swimming", "Schoobel/Trethouse" and "Go Bang #5" (mixed by Francois Kervodan) are the three which still sound revolutionary. Russell really improves on these tracks, playing cello, percussion, keyboards and singing in that high, wistful, amuseur voice of his, while Gibbons chops the flow, treating atmospheres as mobile environments rather than virtual locations.

Russell produced a small number of records. Some

pece over and over, people get tired of it — I heard that one already, I don't have to go again."

So what happened to this single-minded devotion? He laughed: "I went to a disco one night. It made a big impression on me." Which one? "Gallery. Nicky Siano was the DJ. He was one of the first. I had made a tape with Nicky Siano, eventually called 'Kiss Me Again', and Steve D'Aquisto had somehow acquired a tape of that. He liked it a lot." Russell went on to record with D'Aquisto on "Is It All Over My Face". Then he met Walter Gibbons at West End Records. I asked if he saw the dance mixes as extensions of compositions he might perform at The Kitchen, the NYC performance art space. "Unfortunately yeah, I do," he responded. "It tends to scare off record companies. The first *Instrumentals* piece had drums and I remember I had set the drum kit up at The Kitchen. A lot of people turned off. They thought that was a sign of some new

unsophistication — a sign of increasing commercialisation. Then if you try and do something different in dance music, you just get branded as an eccentric. Maybe I am an eccentric, I don't know, but it's basically a very simple idea."

He spoke with regret concealed by laughter of "a damaging conflict between me and the record business", and then continued with this theme of drums: "I like music with no drums, too, partly, I guess, from listening to drums so much. When you hear something with no drums it seems very exciting. I always thought that music with no drums is successive to music with drums. New music with no drums is like this future where they don't have drums any more. In outer space you can't take your drums — you take your mind." That future has arrived, and Arthur had the vision to foresee many of its aspects. "A lot of DJs take the tapes I make and try to make them into something more ordinary," he concluded. "Let's Go Swimming" was supposed to be a futuristic summer record. Some DJs said that nobody would ever, ever play that. I think eventually that kind of thing will be commonplace. "Common perhaps, commonplace never." □ *Another Thought* is released this month on Point Music (through Polygram).

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In **Cuba**, music is a teeming market place, where voodoo, Catholicism, revolutionary edicts and kitsch decadence hang in a volatile balance. But what effect will the country's crumbling economy and increasingly disillusioned youth have on this rich sonic landscape? Peter Culshaw went to find out

paradise

1962 Who was Babalu? I can remember shuffling around my grandparents' living room aged six to a record called "Babalu", possibly recorded by the Cuban bandleader Xavier Cugat. My grandparents won a gold medal in the Latin American dancing championships of Leicestershire. Every Thursday they'd go to the Grand Hotel in Leicester and drink cocktails and dance and dream of palm trees and long tropical nights in Havana. My grandfather had lots of records by Latin bandleaders like Edmundo Ros, Victor Sylvestre, Perez Prado and the biggest Cuban hits of all "Guantanamera" and "El Manicero" ("The Peanut Vendor") by Don Azpárriz. And The Havana Casino Orchestra, who instead of using maracas used cocktail shakers filled with shot. So perhaps I am genetically predisposed to that eternal 3/2 clave rhythm which runs through all Cuban music like a pulsebeat.

23 ON — 92°W Havana's map co-ordinates and a song by Stan Kenton (great trombone by Frank Rosolino).

1987 About to touch down at Havana Airport for the first time. A Peruvian diplomat sitting next to me says, "You know, compared to my country, for poor people Cuba is a paradise."

I was met at the airport by Carlos, a Party official. Anyone arriving in Cuba with a journalist's visa gets their own official, to give you the Party line, steer you away from the 'wrong people' and show you things which cast the Revolution in a good light, like the impressive hospitals, education and sports facilities. On my second evening in Havana I met a woman — call her Celis, a ravishing, dark haired dancer with flashing

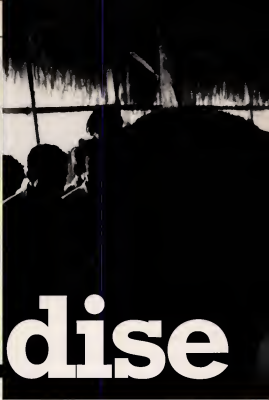
eyes; it became clear that she was allowed everywhere that ordinary Cubans weren't, had no visible means of support yet lived in a gorgeous old colonial mansion. "You realise she's secret police — they hand pick the most beautiful girls," an old Havana hand told me at the bar of the Hotel Nacional where I was staying (sometime hangout of Lucky Luciano, Marlon Brando and Winston Churchill). This only increased her glamour. I was in the world of spies, double-bluffs and honey traps. But I was a little more discreet about telling her who I'd been talking to.

I asked Carlos about Babalu. "It's just superstition, a crazy mix of voodoo and Catholicism: they call Santenó. All the African gods, or orishas, have Catholic equivalents. They all have their own rhythms. Babalu is the god of healing. St. Lazarus is the Catholic saint associated with Babalu. But only a few old people believe that nonsense now."

This was untrue. Santenó is a potent force throughout Cuba, and nearly all the musicians I met were involved in one way or another — the most obvious sign being beads worn round their necks, different colours representing different orishas.

Walking through Old Havana, a friend and I met a santera, a Santenó priestess, dressed in white. She told my female friend that she had a bad spirit following her, and invited us back to her apartment. She sauntered my friend round the head with flowers, muttering incantations, and pronounced that the bad spirit would leave her alone in the future.

That night I took the ferry across the dark, Stygian waters of Havana's port to the black suburb of Regla. The Virgin of Regla is Havana's patron saint, her African equivalent being Yemaya. To pension Yemaya, I was later told by a woman wearing blue and white orisha beads, you don't have to sacrifice animals, just fill a tub of





Cuban Santería ceremony

water, stained with indigo until deep blue, then float a candle on the water.

The church dedicated to the Virgin of Regla is in the main square and contains the wooden image of the black Virgin holding a white baby dating from the 1600s and copied from a 15th century African sculpture. The congregation was full of black women holding dolls on their knees, dogs and children ran wild throughout the service. Next to the church was a house turned into a shrine — the family sat behind a wooden screen in part of the living room watching TV, the rest of the room had images of the Virgin and pictures of Hatuey, the local Indian chief, and there was a photograph of Che Guevara, the asthmatic dentist's son who ended up a Christ-like martyr to the Revolution.

After the Revolution, the Communists tended to distrust the forces of religion, closing down churches and regarding priests as counter-revolutionaries. However, as Marcos Gonzalez, the leader of Sierra Maestra, a group known for their vibrant updates of the Cuban music of the 50s, told me, Fidel Castro is seen by many as the chief babalawo of Santería. His magical powers were confirmed in his first victory speech after the Revolution on 3 January 1959: Doves were released from a cage, and as though choreographed, one flew into the sky and settled on Fidel's shoulder. Doves are associated with Obatala, an important orisha. This was a sign to many Cubans that Fidel had been chosen by the gods.

One afternoon I went to see Celina Gonzalez, the Queen of *musica campesina* (the music of Cuba's rural areas). In her hall is a large statue of Santa Barbara, covered in fairy lights and plastic flowers. Unlike her contemporary and rival Celia Cruz, who defected to the US in the 60s to find fame and fortune, Celina lives simply

in Havana. Her most famous song is a tribute to Santa Barbara and her African equivalent, Chango, and has the refrain, "Que Viva Chango" ("Long Live Chango"). The song has become Cuba's unofficial National Anthem.

Celina has one of the great global pop voices, as confident and powerful (and, occasionally, as brassy) as, say, Shirley Bassey. She plays to crowds of 40,000 in Colombia and Venezuela, but her allegiance to Santería sometimes works against her career. When Marcos Gonzalez rang to say he'd fixed up some concert dates in London, Celina went to see her babalawo, who after throwing divining cowrie shells, told her Chango didn't want her to go.

While Santería is the main Afro-Cuban religion, other similar and more secretive cults exist, such as Palo Monte, associated with black magic, and the Abakuá, which



PHOTO: SCHIBEL

is understandably feared, as the first task of a new recruit is to kill the first passer-by they meet.

The great Cuban conga player Chano Pozo was an Abakuá. During the 1940s, Pozo worked with Dizzy Gillespie in New York at the dawn of Afro-Cuban jazz, and was later murdered in the city. Musicians in Havana told me the reason for his murder was because he had made public Abakuá rhythms which were only supposed to be performed in private ceremonies. Marcos González said it was more likely he was just being 'guapo', a word which means swaggering, stylish, macho, and which is used to describe pimps. González said many friends of his who had left Cuba got killed in the US. "They got into things like deals with drug dealers they couldn't get out of."

On the day I met Celina González the clubs of Havana went dark because the inventor of the cha-cha-cha had died. Enrique Jorrín was a pianist who was credited with developing the rhythmic transform which initiated a dance craze in Cuba in 1953 and which would eventually go around the world. At the National Sound Archive in London, there are recordings of cha-cha-chas from as far afield as Zaire and the Philippines.

According to the American Latin music expert John Storm Roberts, the Cuban cha-cha-cha was played with "fire and grace" by charanga groups such as Orquesta Aragón, but when it was performed by Western musicians it became a novelty act which contributed to the decline of Latin music. "A few years of lumpy rhythm sections, mooring sea sections and musicians raggedly chanting 'cha-cha-cha' were enough," Roberts wrote. This was the start of a process whereby Latin music on export would come to be perceived by many as trite and banal, with musicians like Edmundo Ros in the UK being accused of diluting the music's rhythmic complexity.

Of course, crossover traffic moves both ways. Los Van Van, one of Cuba's top groups since the 1970s, have been heavily influenced by The Beatles. I saw them perform at the Hotel Nacional during the island's International Film Festival. The quixotic Cuban electricity supply gave up during the third song, but the crowd carried

number of concerts performed and the respective musician's status and popularity.

The State also censored lyrics. Songs deemed anti-revolutionary were forbidden, as were songs considered pornographic, although this particular edict was undermined by the Cuban love of the double entendre. Los Van Van have a song about a man following a mule ('muñiz'), which when the audience sings along becomes 'culo' (ass), in American terminology. Likewise, Sierra Maestra have a tune about a girl who likes large pineapples or 'pino', which everyone understands to really mean 'pinto' (ie the male member).

Juan Formell and Celina González both adamantly defended the notion of the State running the music industry, saying the guaranteed wages led to greater security. Ironically, as it turns out — the system has now collapsed. Of the musicians I met, only virtuoso trumpeter Arturo Sandoval has complaints, having just missed out on some prestigious concerts in New York because of the political situation vs a *vis Cuba* and the US. So it came as no great surprise when he defected in 1990. Whether defecting has done his music much good is debatable. When you see him performing today at Western jazz clubs such as Ronnie Scott's, his extraordinary virtuosity can seem facile and vacuous, whereas when I saw him playing to the harder-to-please home crowd in Havana, he was visibly sweating, pushed to delivering danceable grooves with a surprisingly sensitive, often wistful feel. On those hot Havana nights, admittedly with critical faculties blurred by the sweet taste of mint rum mochos, it felt as if Sandoval could beat waste to any trumpet player alive.



Celina González



Arturo Sandoval

17 December 1967 turned out to be one of the most bizarre and memorable nights of my life. To begin with, it was the night of Babalú and the feast of St Lazarus. On no other night of the year is the power of Santería so evident. Over 50,000 people were converging on a church in El Rincón, a village outside Havana. Some pilgrims were strolling along carrying ghetto blasters, while more serious penitents, perhaps those who had had illnesses cured, were somersaulting or crawling the five miles to the church bearing gifts for St Lazarus — he is particularly fond of rum and cigars. The rhythms of Babalú could be heard being played on sacred bata drums all that night.

I went by taxi because I had had an earlier engagement. I had been invited to a party at the Palace of the Revolution, to be hosted by Fidel Castro, Maximum Leader and rumoured chief babalawo. The first person I ran into was the photographer Helmut Newton, in Havana for *Vanity Fair*. (He hated it, complaining about how bad the hotels were compared to Miami.) The tables were weighed down with food, drink and huge cigars. Newton persuaded the author Gabriel García Márquez, who was very friendly with Fidel at the time (rumour has it they've now fallen out), to introduce him to Castro. I was next in line to meet the great leader and was in the middle of asking him about Babalú when he shifted attention to the guest next to me, Oliver Stone. I vaguely remember having a drunken conversation with Stone about *King Kong*, and with Leni Riefenstahl, the fascist German film maker, who was in Havana making underwater films, aged 85.

On my last night in Havana during this particular trip I went to see Los Van Van at the Tropical. When a Westerner asked to be taken to the Tropical, taxi drivers always assume you mean the glitzy, kitsch tourist show at the Tropical rather than the working class Tropical. There was a light outside the venue and the police advised me to stay on the stage with the band and assorted female fans. Like the rest of the audience I was swigging rum from a cardboard can. At the end of one number, Juan Formell came up to me and I told him I was flying home the next day. "You are flying tonight, I think," he grinned.

I thought of Thomas Merton, the trappist monk, who had visited Cuba. "Every step I

on singing the rest of the number, "La Timanika", a song about men obsessed with chasing 'chicas' regardless of the risk to job or family. The title has become a catchphrase in Havana.

I arranged to meet the group's leader, Juan Formell, at his home. When I arrived the only person there was an old man, I presume Formell's father, who offered to teach me to dance. The step was a basic salsa soft-shoe shuffle, but it took me two hours to get it right, and without ever getting close to my teacher's grace and elegance.

Juan Formell arrived eventually and explained the Cuban music system as it was then, whereby the State paid a musician's wages in three levels according to the

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took offered up a new world of joys in that Bright Island where kindness and solitude surrounded me." Mind you, travelling did for Merton in the end: he was electrocuted in Bangkok.

1994 Flying into Havana seven years on, everything had changed. The Soviets had pulled the plug on Cuba. Next to me this time was a woman from Budapest. She was flying in medical supplies to her family, and gave me a squirt of anesthetic as I'd got an appalling toothache. Sitting on the other side of me was a male model from GQ. I asked him why Western style magazines kept using Havana as a backdrop. "Because it's fashionable," he replied.

So the touché, sexy legend of Havana lives on, but at the airport I met a medical researcher who confirmed that Cuba's great triumph of the Revolution, the medical system, was falling apart. I took an unofficial taxi to the hotel which I'd prepaid for in London and which was situated on the beaches on the eastern side of Havana, only to find it was shut. The taxi driver drove me around until I found another one.

Walking on the beach with a Cuban friend, Anais, a Cuban santero tells her mother has heart problems and will die at Christmas. Anais says she doesn't believe in Santería, but her mother has just had a heart operation, and she's visibly shaken. On the way back to the hotel, the extraordinary sight of a fantastically over-made-up woman perched on the basket of a bicycle ridden by a wiry, seventysomething man. This is my first sight of a new phenomenon in Cuba, called *jineteras* (gold diggers) by Cubans. The woman invites me to a disco but I decline — was I supposed to get in the basket with her?

Musically, the old State system in Cuba has more or less collapsed, and singers like Carlos Varela and Pedro Luis Ferrer are singing songs critical of the Castro regime. These are not released officially but everyone has bootleg tapes. Varela's song "Guillermo Tell", which tells of how it's now William Tell's son's turn with the bow, and which works as an allegory for young people's discontent with Communism, is typical. There is also a harder edge to the music you hear on Havana's streets. The

Panamanian rapper General is everywhere, especially popular is his song comparing his girl to a Coca-Cola bottle. The new Cuban groups that have emerged in the past decade are tougher too, notably NG La Banda, who are now the top salsa band in the country with their "Horns Off Terror".

I hitched a lift with the group to a Young Communists rally being held outside Havana. The group's then current hit was "La Briga" ("The Witch"), about a *jinetera* who gets dollars off tourists. They go down a storm, but there's more than a hint of guapo about them, and little room for the old genteel double-entendres.

The other main problem for Cuban musicians remains the lack of access to the US market. For instance, Hispanic radio stations in Miami run by right-wing, anti-Castro Cuban exiles still refuse to play Cuban music. This state of affairs was one of the reasons why IslandMango gave up on its contract with Los Van Van (bureaucratic hassle from Cuba's State record company EGREM was another).

The last time I was in Havana I'd got into the Tropicana by pretending to be Russian and paying in pesos. Despite all the other charges, the Tropicana goes on, the kitschiest show in the world, a frozen relic of Cuba's decadent, pre-Revolutionary days, when high rollers from Miami would fly in for a day's gambling, possibly followed by a visit to a notorious brothel like Casa Marina or to a club where the generously endowed "Supermen" would rip off his cape and perform live sex shows. The Sans Souci Club was the favourite haunt of the Mafia boys.

I met with the Tropicana's choreographer Santiago Alfonso, who is spoken of with awe as some kind of sacred monster by his dancers. He began his club career at Sans Souci before moving to the Tropicana where he now has 180 dancers and a 40-piece orchestra under his control. Alfonso recalled the days when Sarah Vaughan, Tony Bennett and Nat King Cole were the hot acts in Havana, but he couldn't verify a story I'd heard that Liberace once made an entrance at the Tropicana playing a grand piano on the back of an elephant.

Alfonso defended the Revolution, espousing a fairly hardcore Marxist line: as assorted leggy showgirls shimmied by our table and the orchestra played versions of pseudo-Latin classics such as "Bran" and "Besame Mucho" "Never before have we had times like these, but we'll come out of it. Young people get hypnotised, they think everything is good in capitalist countries. But I've seen people sleeping in the street in Europe, and the Mafia has come back to Russia and people are starving there. We are defending our independence, our way of living and being."

In spite of the chronic condition of the Cuban economy, there is still considerable support for the Revolution. At the end of last year, the first independent Gallup poll in Cuba found 48 per cent of the population described themselves as "revolutionaries".

My last day in Havana and a concert marking the anniversary of the death of John Lennon. 60,000 people sing as groups like Sinitess play versions of "All You Need Is Love" and "Imagine". I found it unbearably sad where did all that idealism go? (I was also feeling down because I'd had a fairly terrible time on this visit, having been mugged at gunpoint some days earlier, and because Cuba seemed on the verge of collapse.) But when the 60,000-strong crowd started singing "Power To The People" the energy in the air was palpable. I left the concert with a Cuban friend and we went down to the beach and lit a candle for Yemayá, put it on a saucer, and as the sun went down, pushed it out into the warm blue ocean. □



Babalu at the Tropicana



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LEO LAB CD 005 JOE MORRIS/ROB BROWN

QUARTET ILLUMINATE

Where are the guardians of the New Music? Subtract the ones identified with Prime Time and their harmonic ilk, take away the crowd enabled to Derek Bailey, the abstract improvisers, and Ernst Shro, Casper Bolmann and the noise merchants, and who's left? Well, there is this one guy in Boston, named Joe Morris' (Art Lange, THE WIRE). Rob Brown is a young new star from New York playing alto saxophone. The quartet is augmented by William Parker on bass and Jackson Kroll on drums.

LEO LAB CD 006 HANNES WIENER/PETER

NIKLAS WILSON ALPHEA

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LEO LAB CD 010 JOE MANERI QUARTET GET READY TO RECEIVE YOURSELF

Who has ever heard of microtonal music? And who has ever heard of Joe Maneri? However, if George Russell, Paul Bley, Rein Slake and Cecil Taylor tell us that he is a genius, there must be a grain of truth in it. But look at it from another angle: a Russian emigre in London releases the first CD of 67 year old genius with Joe Maneri subsidising his own CD. It means only one thing — disgrace to America.

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KON ARSEN

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Music is finding new ways to simulate dream states, the latest being the twilight zone sonic reveries of Richard James, aka **Aphex Twin**. Rob Young investigates

messages

A *Writer's dream* I am descending upon a distressed landscape of mud and dung. It is a muddled and muffled dream — shapes pushing up through the sodden, shapeless turf cows' heads, body parts, box shapes, sludge and slush, all brown-coloured, embedded in a slurry of shit and mud, rain bucketing down overhead, no visible sky. Very close-up vision, as if I too am being drawn down into the muck. The feeling is not desolate, but promises impending revelation

Buried Dreams

I dreamed the above dream nearly a year ago, after a week of solid listening to David Toop & Max Eastley's *Buried Dreams*. Being the first dream I could recall for months, it seemed more than usually significant. With hindsight, it appears to bear some relation to the particular impressionability of the best current music, both foreign and recognisable forms visibly moulding into its fabric. In the early days of recording, taped music consisted of what went on in one occasion in the single room of the studio, now a few square feet can contain all the equipment that's needed to turn the inside of your head into a theatre of complex sonics.

This has much to do with the instruments that now let us generate music from almost any material source (footsteps, plums, wind, TV, a day in the country, light). When music is built from sampled fragments of other musics, and noises bearing no relation to recognisable physical acts, recording's previous relationship to the solid presences of notes and melodies, strings and skins, crumbles. The microphone, stylus, wireless, scanner, aerial, portable DAT: these too have become instruments, nets in the tangle. The process of making today's electronic music mirrors the parallel lives of waking and dreaming: the conscious activity of researching and gathering sounds — the learning part — followed by the retreat into the studio to manufacture the track — the stitching together of fantasy.

This adaptability, this malleability, resonates in other areas. Now that power has melted out of its previous, fixed headquarters to be encoded in the flux and transmission of information — political, monetary, or that which relates to the individual — artists' most effective combative action is to learn the language, join the flow.

"I think music is more flexible than any political system," says David Toop, "because any political theory accumulates bureaucracy and corruption as soon as it emerges, whereas music can turn on a whisker. It can change with circumstances."

This mobility registers loudly in the music of — to name a handful — Scanner, Bedouin Ascent, Omni Trio, Oval, and perhaps most compellingly, Aphex Twin (who we will meet presently). On the 12 mixes of the Aphex Twin's new "Ventolin" EP,

you can hear the music's armature creaking and complaining, it wheezes and groans like an asthmatic forced to run for his or her life. (Ventolin is, indeed, the drug prescribed for asthma inhalers.) From his early, influential "Didgendo" track onwards, Richard James has been combining abstract and familiar elements to hallucinatory effect. His latest releases, "Ventolin" and the ensuing album, *I Care Because You Do*, are packed with incident. The music flickers between synthesized textures and domestically recorded location sounds, while at other times pollutant blasts of distortion seem to blow in and scrage the music's skin like a burst of roadworks through an open window. It's a highly plausible suggestion of the borderline state between dreaming and waking.

Flicker dreams

The first movies were little more than flickbooks of Maybridge stills in a silent not of movement, they explored as many physical and physiological phenomena as it was possible to engineer. The static camera recorded whatever stood, walked, danced, fell,



flew, or fought in front of it. Yet the passive recorder also set in motion the closest conscious simulation of a dream, which has steered the imagination of the last 100 years: audiences were fixed in front of a tableau where nothing could deviate (as in the theatre) from the original version, their vision filled with outside images, faces, action, and underwent a symbolic waking as the lights came up at the end. 100 years later, movies are all about noise, Serengeti, the verbiage and wall-to-wall rock of Tarantino's world. Or, as in Derek Jarman's *Blue*, sounds alone: mimeses, whispers, music, noises all below through the filtering gaze of the screen. Some stick in the mind, others drift out of reach: the choice of what to latch on to is determined by the viewer/listener.



Celia Green

There are recollections of Debussy sitting down at the piano and playing the impression of an ocean wave into the instrument, much as a painter might sketch the scene on the spot in watercolour. Much of the music peculiar to the 20th century, from Debussy and Ravel's chromatic palettes to more open ended forms such as improvisation, have been concerned with the struggle to make the instrument as transparent as possible, so as not to obstruct free expression. Composers such as Scriabin and Debussy extended the overripe, Romantic notion of expressiveness to take into account the mechanics of the instrument and performance, to achieve a kind of gestural music.

Scriabin, unable to perform his own "Black Mass" piano sonata because it gave him nightmares, conceived the first (never performed) large-scale multimedia event, *Mysterium*, a giant orchestral work which was meant to include a flashing, coloured light-wheel and a barrage of smoke and smells. These intuitive attempts to move beyond the technical and temporal limitations of instrument and performance connect with modern electronic music, both bypassing the figures of iconic rock star, experimental jazz soloist and hermetic avant-garde composer that pepper the mid-to late part of the 20th century.

"More the delicate construction of the music, the more there is," says David Toop. "When you're doing complex music, which is organised with a kind of principle of a disintegrating skeleton — bones could fly off at the slightest tremor — it's very difficult. Especially when you're dealing with chaotic principles, where the music has a life, the harmonic and electronic variables build and create their own organic substance, with distorting likenesses and rhythmic accidents."

A Singer's dream She is standing in front of a conveyor belt, on which objects of unrecognisable shape pass along in front of her. These turn out to be component parts of a whole which she must assemble to make up pieces of music. No sense of where they are coming from, or where they go on to if she does not choose them.

Lucid dreams

"Look of clarity is always a sign of dishonesty" — Celia Green

Every generation has its dreams and its dream weavers. For most of the century that's now coming to a close, dreams have reflected time-honoured symbols and myths back to us through the work of Carl Jung. But there is a secret history for most things this century, and in the study of dreams it has been manifest in the research into 'lucid dreaming'. Freud called dreams "the royal road to the unconscious", but lucid dreamers occupy that road and set up a toll booth.

In Oxford in 1961, a disillusioned research student called Celia Green founded the

Institute for Psychophysical Research. As she later documented in books such as *The Decline And Fall Of Science And Advice To Obedient Children*, the Institute devoted itself to the study of experiences that can be perceived, remembered and described afterwards, but which do not tally with established scientific explanations of the workings of the world, such as out-of-body experiences, parapsychology, extra-sensory perception and lucid dreaming. Green's highly single-minded approach was, and remains, pragmatically skeptical of all accepted beliefs and theories, taking nothing on trust, especially the luxury of authority which the scientific establishment has enjoyed for so long.

In 1968 she published *Lucid Dreams*, the first examination of the paradox of consciousness during sleep. Drawing on the 1930s research of psychologists Hirschman and Embury Brown, as well as her own work at the Institute, she expounded, drawing only tentative conclusions, the phenomenon that some subjects who had put their minds to it had discovered and could develop a way of realising that they were dreaming in the midst of a dream, and seize the reins of the dream in order to test its properties and limits. Subjects reported being able to hear and taste in a more vivid way than in waking life, deaf dreamers heard sounds clearly, the blind 'saw' colours.

David Thompson and Chris Allen, the partners behind Nottingham's Em1 label and long-time admirers of Green's books, established contact with the Institute in 1994. Next month, they plan to release *Lucid Dreams*, a CD of spoken word recordings by Celia Green made especially for the label, set to an electronic soundtrack created in their own dream factory, the Time Studio, which incorporates a 3D digital sound imaging system. On one track, Green offers specific instructions on how anyone can achieve lucid dreaming. For Thompson and Allen, the project demonstrates one way in which music could engage with, confront and detour entrenched belief systems. "Lucid dreams raise questions about perception," says Thompson. "If a person is aware they are dreaming, our definitions of consciousness must be inadequate. Music also raises questions of perception. How does a sequence of notes, patterns and tones, essentially just vibrating air, evoke such complex suggestions? We're encouraged to think of music as 'entertainment', just a diversion, but music can obviously be used to explore and define parts of our psychology which we usually ignore — perhaps at a price."

When You Wake, You're Still In A Dream

The air is thick with fudge, although no one's handing any out. In the adjacent rooms lie the skeletons of redundant camera equipment. Richard James stands impassively having his last few pictures taken. As we leave the fudge factory in search of a cup of tea, Richard, walking at half my pace, stops to peer into a paper shredding factory, kick bags of rubbish, and is pulled up short by the sign above a Chinese take away. "Good Friends?" he scoffs, more with bewilderment than scorn. "What does that mean?"

This is Richard James, Aphex Twin, Polygon Window, Caustic Window, Dice Man, his musical emissions made of pure trace elements and raw materials, where that of most Twinpense is expendable by-product. We enter a quiet cafe, the only one visible on this long East End street, but as soon as I switch on a tape to record our conversation, the air fills up with braying TV sets, a loud radio news bulletin, hammering and Chinese waitresses singing along to pop songs. We are the only customers.

The Aphex Twin's dream "I was trying to write it out over my complaints this morning. I don't reckon it would make any sense (I explained it, it wasn't a story, not like I was here, doing that — it was just conversations with I don't know who? I don't know exactly what was going on, but it was quite fucked up. And there weren't any sounds in it at all".

Richard James's 1994 album *Selected Ambient Works II* was a sprawling, downspace whose vista was obscured by gas, mists, distressed textures, smeared lenses. With hardly a gaudy beat in earshot, it was a prime example of the lucid dreaming recordings that James had been talking about in interviews. The new Aphex Twin album, *I Care Because You Do*, although recorded "consciously", has more characteristics of the popular image of a lucid dream than any of James's previous work. The track "Alberto Balsam" magically jumps from its original percussive loop —

which seems to consist of drums and camera shutter-clicks or snipping hardresser's scissors — to a passage of percussion on a domestic radiator, then back to the drums again, a split-second leap from the preset world of sequenced rhythms to a hasty, amateurish tapping on domestic fixtures. At the beginning of the next track, a door slams and James's voice is heard shouting, before the rhythm track kicks in. It's been taped with a portable DAT from bedroom speakers, and you can hear James shuffling around in the room before jacking the disk sound into the mix, so that the music can be heard 'properly.' It's an unsettling alchemy, this constant shifting between machine acoustics and realtime experience.

As suspected, Richard James isn't hugely interested in debating in depth the implications of what he does, although he graciously answers all my questions without hesitation, offering so much information, then stopping. It's a cliché, rarely true, that most of the answers are to be found in the music, but it seems more than usually applicable in this case, especially in the music he says he keeps concealed in his private archive. He claims to operate according to a prickly yet somehow admirable logic, not caring who hears his music, only releasing records and doing the promotional rounds in order to make a living. "The only reason I'm putting records out is to make some money, and I don't reckon people would get into it if I released some of the more unconventional stuff that I do. My friends want to hear things that I've done, and that's cool, but I don't particularly want to hear it again, I just like making new stuff."

We pause and listen to the hammering, and the cars swishing past in the rain outside. Does he hear music all the time, I wonder out loud, is he hearing the street as music? "Yeah." Is that a problem? "Yeah, fucking pisses me off badly, but there's nothing I can really do about it."

The process of creating music electronically could be seen as a correlative of dreaming. The musician creates a mosaic out of sonic fragments, but the mosaic exists in more than two dimensions: sampled snatches of music are snippets of other people's experience, location and environmental recordings hold personal memories, sense-impressions, emotional associations. All these are recombined and arranged in the mixing desk, in the dub (and here we might as well consult the dictionary definition of 'dub': "an alternative soundtrack, esp in a different language").

The secret, for musicians as for lucid dreamers, is in trying to find a balance point between when to control and when to let go: does becoming too aware of what you're doing dispel the magic? "The grade changes," says Richard James. "You'll be on another planet, thinking, What made me get myself here? And those are the best ones, when they're in the middle. More interesting, because it's really unexpected. But when you're totally in control it's usually more boring, because nothing really moves around, you don't get all this weird shit going on. It's quite like being awake, and that's not all that interesting."

I ask him if his dreams seem more real than waking life. "I think dreams are a bit more honest, because you don't lie to yourself in dreams. I don't think you have an ego and all this business, it all seems to disappear. The way you are in a day is basically the way you were shaped the night before when you were sleeping, and when you're asleep, that's when all your thoughts are put into order — it's when your brain does all its filing, prepares you for the next conscious day. You could argue that when you sleep that's when all the shit goes down."

Richard James claims never to have heard of Celia Green or her writings; he discovered he could lucid dream "when I was little", and was only able to give it a name after he watched a QED programme about three lucid dreamers meeting up in each other's dreams. Except that you can't help feeling that he's exactly the kind of prodigy Celia Green was addressing in her *Advice To Clever Children*, especially when he answers my parting question whether he considers himself a mystic. "That's not me at all, I'm much more logical. I'm pretty old school when it comes to things like that. I have to see things before I believe them."

Dreams have traditionally been used to illuminate waking lives, the new Aphex Twin music illuminates the way waking visions can start to spill back into unconscious reveries. Here, as in so many other areas, the borders are fuzzing. The convergence of all these strands at this moment registers a wider conflux of information and global communication; music is taking its own share of this great learning. The lines are converging, focusing, and stretching ahead to their vanishing point. □



This month, we conclude *The Wire* guide to the music everyone loves to hate and meet a crazy Frenchman, several Earthmothers, some suburban fascists and various pairs of terrifying trousers

A TO Z of Prog Rock **Part Two**



Christian Vander

M is for **Magma**. "Magma are for the Me, for the death and for after the death" — Christian Vander

How to relate, in just a few words, the quarter-century of apocalyptic reveries and megalomaniacal conceits that constitute the life of the French group Magma? The group was formed in 1969 as a vehicle for drummer/vocalist Christian Vander to realise a musical vision that makes *Tales From Topographic Oceans* look like the Initial Teaching Alphabet: a huge, neo-fascistic, ongoing oratorio on the state of Earth's future, complete with predictions of Armageddon and the coming of the cosmic deity Ptah. Magma music was characterised by a quasi-ritualistic mix of operatic hysteria (courtesy of Vander's vocalise wife Stella and massed Wagnerian choirs), screaming brass sections, thunderous martial rhythms and jazz rock soloing all shoehorned into large-scale compositions influenced by Carl Orff, Stravinsky and John Coltrane. Vander has also invented his own language, 'Kobaïen', inspired partly by Luther Thomas's scat-yodelling on Pharoah Sanders tracks like "The Creator Has A Masterplan", with which to relate his towering conceits, and coined the term 'zeuhl' to describe a genre of music which "aspires to goals beyond the material world", which basically encompasses Magma and the handful of French Prog groups (Art Zoyd, Heldon, Wadone) who have emerged under Vander's influence. Curiously, one of Magma's most visible fans is the snooker player Steve Davis, who, in the 80s, wanted to see the group play live in the UK so much that he promoted and financed a concert himself.

M is also for **Mothergong**, the 'feminist' offshoot of Gong (see part one) led by Geli Smyth and named after "the mothering experiences, both real and spiritual, which preceded the recording of [the group's] first album".

M is also for **Matching Mole**, the group formed by Robert Wyatt in 1971 after he left Soft Machine (see below). In a piece of whimsy typical of the Canterbury Scene (see part one), Matching Mole's name was derived from the French for Soft Machine: 'machine mola'.



Soft Machine and friends

PHOTO: PHILIP ELWOOD

N

is for **National Health** In the mid-70s, Hatfield & The North, yet another Canterbury Scene group (made up of past/future members of lots of other Canterbury Scene groups — Caravan, Matching Mole, Egg), used to perform 'double quartet' gigs with the equally obscure Gilmesh. Out of these performances emerged National Health. However, this was circa 1976, punk's Year Zero, as a consequence, National Health's brand of quirky jazz Prog was about as uncivil as it was possible to get and the group disappeared without trace. Consequently, NH is regarded by many Prog purists as the last true Prog group.

N is also for **Tom Newman**, producer of Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* (see below), and architect of that future Prog shrine, the Virgin Records Manor House studio complex.

N is also for **Neo-Prog** You think Prog is just an old, unsightly stain on rock's rich tapestry? Forget it! Today the spirit of Prog lives on in The Orb's collaborations with Robert Fripp and Steve Hillage, the New Age reissues of the Californian Windham Hill label, Euro Prog groups like Sweden's Gothic Anglagard (who use three mellotrons), the post-Gong/Hawkwind space Prog of Ozric Tentacles and Porcupine Tree, the Henry Cow-inspired groups who congregate around Chris Cutler's *Rei Recommended* label (see Rock In Opposition below) including The Work, ZNR, The (EO) Nudes, Sius, Motor Totemist Guild, Thinking Plague.



PHOTO © BLUESPEARS

P is also for **Alan Parsons**, engineer on *Dark Side Of The Moon*, who formed The Alan Parsons Project to release, throughout the late 70s/early 80s, a series of inexplicably popular pseudo-Prog Concept Albums, including, predictably, a version of Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales Of Mystery And The Imagination*.

P is also for **Prog On The Net**, as located at *Adorned: 60s, 70s, Progrock*. "Art rock intellectuals (read: never-grown-up record collecting guys) sustain discussion of the Progressive rock of the 70s. Argument for argument's sake erupts over tongue-in-cheek posts like 'Confessions Of A Rush Fan' — Necrotic

O

is for **Mike Oldfield** In 1972, 19 year old multi-instrumentalist Oldfield, then a member of a group called The Whole World (fronted by Prog folkie Kevin Ayers) but with secret ambitions of his own, met Richard Branson, the equally ambitious owner of a chain of discount record shops. The former was trying to convince a record company to release an extended 50 minute long composition he was working on, combining rock, jazz and classical influences, and the latter was looking for a suitably 'hip' initial release for his new record label. In May 1973, Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* became the first release on Branson's Virgin Records, and the parallel worlds of popular music, record retailing and international air travel would never be the same again.

O is also for **Terry Oldfield**, Mike's brother and another multi-instrumentalist. Not as famous as his brother, but that doesn't bother him, Goddammit!



PHOTO © BARRY SHARPE, REGENERS

Q

is for **Quad** On record, stereo sound obviously wasn't sufficient to reproduce Prog's 'advanced' sonic concepts, hence Quad (short for Quadrophonic Sound), the music system "for people with four ears". Unfortunately, people don't have four ears, not even Prog fans, and following Quadrophonic releases of *Tubular Bells* and *Dark Side Of The Moon*, Quad joined other expanded spatial music systems of the Prog era, such as Pink Floyd's *Asylum Coordinator* and Edgar Froese's *The Artificial Head*, in technological oblivion.

Q is also for **Quintessence**, self-styled Notting Hill hippy collective (fronted by flautist Raja Ram), distant cousins of Hawkwind, who combined 'metaphysical' concepts with Indian ragas, jazz rock undertones, marimba chanting and hopelessly inept musicianship in early anticipation of a 90s night out at Whirly-Gig.

R

is for **Rock In Opposition** "Art is not a mirror, it is a hammer" — Henry Cow

Unlike the music of most Prog groups, that of Henry Cow came with a political agenda attached. The group was formed by Chris Cutler, Fred Frith and Tim Hodgkinson at Cambridge University in 1968 at the time of the Prague Spring and the Paris student riots, events which galvanised the dour Marxist philosophies which underpinned the group's experimental admix of chamber rock, free jazz and avant garde composition. This counter-culture attitude was made explicit when the group established Rock In Opposition, a kind of anti-Prog version of Rock Against Racism and Red Wedge (This didn't mean HC were averse to employing the kind of whimsical approach to music usually associated with the Canterbury Scene groups: often when they played live, the stage was laid out like a Victorian parlour, the group performing while seated in armchairs). Among numerous other post-Cow activities, Cutler (also a music critic) would go on to join Pere Ubu and run the Rei label (see Neo-Prog above), while Frith turned up in New York in the late 70s as a member of Bill Laswell's Massacre to become an unlikely participant in the city's No Wave movement (he is now a regular on the international improv circuit). In another unlikely

P

is for **Pink Floyd** Formed in the late 60s during the first wave of UK psychedelia and initially dominated by the acid fantasies of Syd Barrett, The Floyd (as Prog fans of the day insisted on calling them) moved into Prog territory (following Barrett's messy departure) on mid-70s albums such as *Moodies*, *Obscured By Clouds* and *Dark Side Of The Moon* (a record which was inescapable for large tracts of the decade). Over the years the group has become a paradigm for anyone looking to dominate music's global economy, growing into a monolithic force whose live shows are the rock equivalent of the Nuremberg Rally, and where music is a footnote to the overarching spectacle.

progression, saxophonist Hodgkinson later joined industrial jazz metalheads God.

R is also for **Todd Rundgren**. The early career of this Philadelphia maverick was a glittering success, encompassing post-Sgt. Pepper psychedelia in *The Nazz*, multi-instrumentalism and studio innovations in *Runt*, radical rock/pop/soul crossovers, early synth experiments and more. Then in 1974 he released an album called *Utopia* which plunged him headlong into Prog's critical black hole where he would remain for much of the next two decades, releasing tracks inspired by Zen Buddhism ("A Treatise On Cosmic Fire") or loaded down with esoteric concepts and Baroque arrangements ("Singing And The Glass Guitar (An Electrified Fairy Tale)"). In recent years, Rundgren (like Genesis's Peter Gabriel, see part one) has redeemed his rep somewhat by investing heavily in such vanguard multimedia music technologies as CD-i and interactive audiotapes.

R is also for **Rush**, white collar Canadian Prog power trio whose 80s Concept Album 2112 drew heavily on the writings of the white supremacist author Ayn Rand (be *The Fountainhead*) and consequently got the group labelled suburban fascists by an outraged music press. Worryingly, Rush have been cited as an influence by a

number of 'alternative' US musicians, from Jane's Addiction and The Pixies to Metallica (and very strange) Black Rock Coalition guitarist Vernon Reid.

R is also for **Renaissance**, who had one of the most unlikely Prog pedigrees of all, being formed by Keith Reif and John Hawken, refugees from The Yardbirds and The Nashville Teens respectively. Both were soon out of the frame, however, and Renaissance's subsequent 'explorations' into classical/folk rock were dominated by the twin Earthmother personae of poetess Betty Thatcher and singer Annie Haslam.



PHOTO: ALLEN A. BARBER/STYLING



PHOTO: PHIL COSTELLO/REDFERNS



Rush

PHOTO: PHIL COSTELLO/REDFERNS

S is for **Soft Machine**. The ultimate Canterbury Scene group. Over the years, it feels like Soft Machine (named after the William Burroughs novel by Gong's future chief groom David Allen — Bill gave his approval) has contained every UK musician who ever grew his hair and donned a dashiki in the name of Progressive jazz fusion: Allen, Robert Wyatt, Hugh Hopper, Allan Holdsworth, John Etheridge, Mike Ratledge, Kevin Ayers, Elton Dean, Marc Chang. As connoisseurs will tell you that The Softs just never achieved their true potential on record, but, live — man, they were spiritual, you know? The complex minutiae of the group's early career is detailed in Wyatt's biography *Wrong Movements* (SAF).

S is also for **Symphonic Soul**. Paralleling the 'progressive' developments in US fusion and Latin music during the late 60s/early 70s (see part one), certain American R&B musicians and producers were soon scaling their own face of the Prog edifice, and they called it Symphonic Soul. Working from a basic model of 60s R&B, Isaac Hayes, Thom Bell, Norman Whitfield and others constructed a heaving monolith of epic orchestrations, exotic instrumentation, heavy studio processing and 'right on' lyrical concepts. For historical evidence, consult Hayes's "By The Time I Get To Phoenix" and The Temptations' "Ball Of Confusion".

S is also for **Style**. Or perhaps lack of it. Its 1972, you need something to wear because you're going to see Frump at the Student Union and your wardrobe looks like this: greatcoat, Afghan, loon pants, split knee flares frayed at the hems, checkered shirt, University sweatshirt, tie-dyed scoop necked T-shirt, flitty plemolls, a bottle of patchouli oil... Hey! Looking good, man.



Isaac Hayes

PHOTO: DAVID REDFERN

T is for **Third Ear Band**. Purveyors in the late 60s of microtonal, droning improvisations

utilising oboes, flutes, cellos, clarinets, etc. TEB's Prog credentials were assured in 1972 when they recorded the soundtrack for Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* which was released complete with a sleeve designed by Roger Dean (see part one). The group is most notable now for the presence of cellist Paul Budmaster, who introduced Miles Davis to the music of Stockhausen, and anticipated 90s concepts of swarm logic via his *Chronicus Ensemble* album, the tracks of which were named after insect body parts.

T is also for **This Heat**. Depossessed latter-day Prog reconstitutions led by Charles Bullen and drummer Charles Hayward, who mixed post-Henry Cow excursions into tricky time signatures, with marathon, trance-inducing, percussive locked grooves ("Strange twist, Bullen is now collaborating with UK Tribal Techno pioneer Tony 'Moody Boy' Thorpe").

T is also for **Techno rock**. An early term for Prog rock. Other pre-Prog sobriquets included flash rock and — very apt — pomp rock.



Third Ear Band

U

is for **UK** The short-lived (praise the Lord) ensemble represented the nadir of the typically self-important Prog notion of the 'supergroup', providing a temporary home for a variety of second-string Prog journeymen: Bill Bruford (Yes, King Crimson), Allan Holdsworth (Soft Machine), Eddie Jobson (Curved Air), John Wetton (King Crimson, Unhapp, Heath, the dreaded Asa)



while KC's Robert Fripp produced Centopede's one album for RCA's Prog label Neon (Obscure jazz rock tria Brand X's keyboard player Robin Lumley is a relative of Joanna 'Absolutely Fabulous' Lumley)

PHOTO: GERRARD/RENE

Y

is for **Yes** What can you say? The quintessential Prog group formed under the early influence of Keith Emerson's proto-Prog, pre-ELP (see part one) group The Nice, but were still covering tracks by The Beatles and The Byrds on their debut 1969 album They soon put a stop to that, establishing an approach on records such as *Fragile*, *Relayer* and *Close To The Edge* that contained all of Prog's worst characteristics: four-square, quasi-orchestral arrangements, artless displays of individual virtuosity, a lyrical 'concept' (courtesy of vocalist Jon Anderson, whose thin, nasal whine of a voice remains one of the most unlovable sounds in all music) that aspired to cosmic utterance but never got beyond the Sixth Form common room. Culturally and musically, Yes remain irredeemable



PHOTO: WAKEMAN

V

is for **Van Der Graaf Generator** 'The most Baroque of all art rock ensembles,' wrote Richard Cook in *The Wire* 128 of this UK group. As with King Crimson (see part one), Van Der Graaf Generator (formed at Manchester University in 1967) are one of the few Prog outfits whose music (Prog fans say) still stands up today. How come? Like Crimson, The Graaf is (that's how you refer to them?) favoured a dense, angular, discordant take on the Prog blueprint (based initially around a musical concept that 'boasted' 'no electric guitars'), while the lyrics of the group's leader Peter Hammill were loaded down with satirical barbs and Gothic images of decay and destruction, an approach he has maintained since the group split in 1972 (his solo career currently stretches to some 25 albums)

W

is for **Rick Wakeman** Rumour has it that when Yes (see below) played live, the group's rder contained hippy staples like fruit juice and organic food, but when keyboard player and all-round Prog slob Rick Wakeman joined (in 1971), steak and kidney pie and brown ale were added. In the early 70s, Wakeman was probably the most hated man in music, reviled (ironically) as a rock aristocrat — he was the director of over ten companies, including one which hired out his personal fleet of Rolls Royce limos. His solo projects of the time have become legendary for their hysterical folly. When he presented his version of Jules Verne's *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth* at London's Crystal Palace, the production included his group (the wretchedly named English Rock Ensemble), an orchestra, choir, and inflatable dinosaurs fighting in a lake in front of the stage. Likewise, *The Myths And Legends Of King Arthur And The Knights Of The Round Table* was conceived as a pageant on ice, a kind of Prog rock version of *Tonill & Dean*, again complete with choir and orchestra, plus inflatable castles and ice skating knights wedding cardboard broadswords. If that isn't enough for you, Wakeman is also a mate of Ken Russell.

W is also for **The Wilde Flowers** The first Canterbury Scene group and consequently one of the fountainheads of UK Prog. The blame/credit for much of what followed lies here

X

is for **Brand X** As with fusion (see part one), the boundaries separating Prog and jazz rock begin to blur the more you look at them. Brand X might have been labelled as a UK Weather Report but the group was formed by drummer Phil Collins out of the seasons for Genesis's mid-period Prog album *A Trick Of The Tail*. Similarly, there was a sense of mutual exchange in the relationship between Prog gods King Crimson and the jazz rock ensemble Centopede: the latter's free jazz-inspired pianist Keith Tippett played on the former's 1970 *Lizard* album,



PHOTO: WILKINSON

Z

is for **Frank Zappa** Frank isn't really Prog is he? Well, maybe not, but how else do you describe a musician who funnelled a grounding in black R&B and West Coast psychedelia through sensibilities warped by exposure to Eric Dolphy's free jazz and Edgard Varèse's classical compositions and whose whole career was one long Concept Album based on some strange notion concerning poodles?

Special thanks to Dave Morrison, Trevor Morawing, Simon Hopkins, Paul Schutze, Chris Blackford, David Ilic, Jakubowski and Mick Fish. Part one of this article appeared in *The Wire* 133. See Back Issues, page 65



Composer **Morton Feldman** embodied the notion of the enigmatic artist — glittering, distant and elusive. Now, eight years after his death, his still, atmospheric music is gaining a whole new audience. Story by Edward Fox

annihilated angel

The composer Howard Skempton tells the following story about the late American composer Morton Feldman. In 1979 he was editing the score of Feldman's *Spring Of Chosroes* for Feldman's London publisher, Universal Edition. Skempton had been an admirer of Feldman's music since the mid-60s, but here the score seemed uninspired, empty. "I couldn't see those characteristic meaty chords," he said. So he rang Universal's director, Bill Colorian, and expressed his misgiving.

"Morty's in London now. Why don't you ring him and talk to him about it yourself?" Colorian said. This was Feldman's sabbatical year from his post at the University of New York at Buffalo.

From the mid-60s Skempton had been one of Feldman's original group of musical advocates in the UK, a group which included the pianist John Tilbury and the composer Cornelius Cardew (both, at different times, members of AMM). Now he was put into the awkward position of having to approach the great man and tell him that he didn't think he was writing up to his usual standard. Skempton rang the number and told Feldman what was on his mind. "I expected to be blasted," he said.

There was a long pause. (This seems characteristic, in his music Feldman is a master of long pauses.) "You may have a point," Feldman said quietly, then gave an astonishing explanation. "I'm into anonymity at the moment." Rather than blast him, he invited Skempton to visit him at the house he was staying in, off Finchley Road in North London.

They spent the best part of a day discussing the piece Feldman was then composing, *Woln And Orchestra*. "It was his first really extended piece," Skempton recalls, "and it was already over an hour long. At one point he showed me some of the samplers [nothing to do with music technology, but pieces of embroidery stretched on small wooden frames] and rugs he was collecting. He said one of the things he loved about them — and this had to do with the particular virtuosity of the children and women who made them — he was fascinated by what was largely a female craft — was the little irregularities and asymmetries. He was obviously charmed by that."

At one point, Feldman noticed that one of the samplers' wooden frames was missing a screw, so he decided to replace it. "It took half a day to do this," Skempton said. They walked all the way down Finchley Road, so the composer could find a shop that sold the correct type of screw. Then they came back to the house and Feldman carefully put the screw into the sampler frame. "That was the tempo of the day," says Skempton. "I thought, 'No wonder his pieces take four hours to perform.'"

This episode contains a lot of clues about Morton Feldman's music and about Feldman himself. For instance, he wasn't just showing off his collection of rugs; he was explaining to Skempton a principle of his music: the idea that an acute, patient attention to minute variations in a pattern (like the small irregularities and asymmetries in an Anatolian village carpet) was as good as a vast amount of grand

compositional drama.

Another clue was the long time scale he needed to get this very personal message across. Since his death in 1987 he has become best known for the very long pieces written in his later years, like *String Quartet II* which lasted five hours when performed in London in 1984 by The Kronos Quartet, or the four and a half hour *For Philip Guston* (1984) that covers four CDs. These pieces require considerable stamina on the part of audiences, particularly in venues with uncomfortable seats.

Feldman explained the idea behind writing such long compositions (a kind of professional suicide for any composer who depends for his reputation on the public performances of his music) in a lecture in Toronto in 1983. He wanted to "get rid of the audience", to write in a way that depended on a more intimate relation between performer and listener. The two needed time to get to know each other, he felt. In the same lecture, he related the origin of the idea with a bisterious, New Yorkish anecdote that would not be out of place in a Woody Allen movie.

"I got the cue from a big time publisher. I would see once in a blue moon. He turned to me one night after a concert at the Russian Tea Room [a famous showbiz watering hole in Manhattan] and said, 'Feldman, do you mind if I tell you something?'"

"I said, 'Go ahead.'"

"He said, 'You're not going to make it — unless.'"

"I said, 'Unless what?'"

"He said, 'You're a fabulous composer, really wonderful. Unless.'"

"Unless what?'"

Here Feldman paused in his narration. "You need a little drama," He paused again. "Not much! But you need a little drama. Just a little bit."

"So after living for 25 years with absolutely no drama in my music — I had plenty in my domestic life — I started to think about that."

Feldman's solution was to write these incredibly long compositions where hardly anything happens. This was his idea of drama.

Morton Feldman is the embodiment of the enigma of the obscure, the distant, glittering object that is all the more alluring for being remote and indistinct. Of all the members of the New York School, the term now used to corral together the modernist poets, artists and composers who worked in post-war New York, Feldman represents a king-sized lacuna. Although he had many famous friends from among these circles, he seems to exist only as a name in the index of their biographies, while his own biography remains unwritten. Yet he often said that he wanted to be "the first great composer who is Jewish", and was disgruntled by the lack of fame he enjoyed

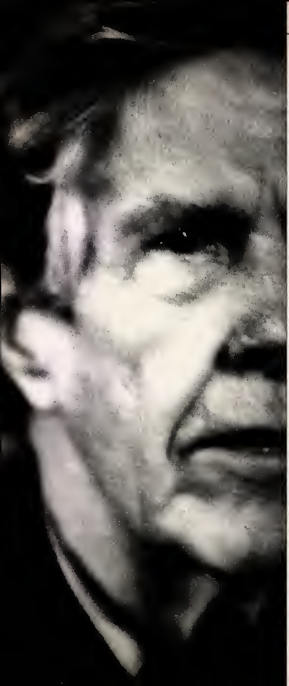


PHOTO: GARY DE SWARTH

in his lifetime, that he should be considered by some to be no more than a "footnote in Stockhausen's biography"

The nearest thing to a decent account of Feldman's life is to be found in the book of essays and lectures published in honour of his 60th birthday in 1985 (*Essays*, edited by Walter Zimmermann). He was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1926, and at the age of 12 began to study piano with a sophisticated Russian emigre, Madame Maunna-Pres, who inspired in him what he called "a vibrant musicality rather than musicianship." As a teenager he studied with the composers Wallingford Riegger and Stefan Wolpe.

The turning point came when he met John Cage at a concert in New York in 1949 (in the lobby of Carnegie Hall, where both had fled to escape a piece by Rachmaninov). This was Feldman's introduction to the New York School's loose milieu of painters, musicians and other artistic personalities. In his mid-twenties, Feldman moved into an apartment in Cage's building on Grand Street, in downtown Manhattan, and it was from here that he found friends and acquaintances among the luminaries of this rich period in American cultural history: the painters Philip Guston (a close friend), Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg, Mark Rothko, the poet Frank O'Hara. Cage also introduced Feldman to ideas of indeterminacy and graphic notation, a musical aesthetic which liberated his creativity. In music, as the recent *Hat Art* releases entitled *The New York School* suggest, he was closely associated with Cage disciples like Earle Brown and Chrisan Wolff. They were all collegial and competitive. "It was big stakes we were after in those times," Feldman recalled.

Feldman became Edgar Varèse Professor Of Music at New York University at Buffalo in 1973 and held this post for 14 years until his death. His influence as a composer owes much to his example as a teacher.

His artistic obscurity — relative to the stars of the New York School — had nothing to do with his personality, which was gregarious, funny and stimulating, and everything to do with his music, which was concerned with values of reticence, quietness, fairness, stillness, hardly the sort of thing to make headlines in a world where the avant garde was supposed to exotize and outrage. As Michael Finnissy, one of his most stalwart British advocates, put it, "I don't think Morton Feldman's music is ever going to be that popular." There are lots of reasons for this, and they are all good reasons for listening to the music. For one, Feldman was not a musical ideologue or a conceptualist. In this he was very different from Cage, whose music was almost entirely theoretical and based on a cult of the personality of Cage. Much of Cage is unlistenable now as a result. You can listen to Feldman.

Instead, Feldman was interested in musical instruments, individually and in combination with other instruments, and in the sounds they made. It was an aesthetic of radical simplicity, yet with a profoundly esoteric effect. He felt that every note an instrument played was distinct and unique and different from any sound that went before or came after, like stitches in an Anatolian rug.

Listening to pieces like *For Christen Wolf* for piano, flute and glockenspiel, with its sparse, airy arrangement of widely spaced, pure sounding, unadorned, unaccompanied notes, you feel that Feldman was so seduced, so intoxicated by the individual sounds the instruments made that he had just thrown his compositional authority to the wind and let the notes proceed autonomously. The personality of the composer seems to have abdicated, or, like the ego of the Sufi mystic, to have been "annihilated" by and in the One of its contemplation. The lights are on but there's nobody home. Another marketing problem. (To underline all this, Feldman chose bone-dry, ultra-modest titles, which either name musical instruments, as in *Piano, Three Voices, Four Instruments*, or are offered to friends, usually famous. For *Samuel Beckett, For John Cage*, etc.)

Feldman was a master of extravagantly faint gestures. In 1976 he collaborated with Samuel Beckett on an 'opera' called *Neither*, the libretto of which Beckett sent the composer on a postcard. In a letter to Beckett, acknowledging how "thrilled" he was to receive the text and reporting on the progress of the composition, Feldman wrote, "It would be as if she [the singer] is singing a tune but it's not there." On scores, he favoured the indication *ppppp*, a dynamic level so quiet you can barely hear it. In an essay entitled "The Anxiety Of Art" he wrote, "I was once told about a woman living in Paris — a descendant of Scriabin — who spent her entire life writing music not meant to be heard. What it is, and how she does it, is not very clear; but I have

always envied this woman. I envy her sanity, her impracticality."

Feldman didn't need to envy this impracticality — he already possessed it. Herein lies his uncompromising greatness. Another important marketing problem in Feldman's music is its static quality, a characteristic often seen in tandem with marathon length. He was explicit in borrowing aesthetic principles from painting, particularly the Abstract Expressionists. He wanted his compositions to present a single, flat plane of sound, like an abstract painting, where one concentrates on the variations of texture within a field that could be extended infinitely in any direction. It was an approach that did away with beginning, middle and end, and often with any sort of development.

A musician who worked with Feldman, though, will tell you this tendency toward the disappearance of the self of the composer was an illusion in practice. A young British conductor told me about rehearsing a piece, a long extravaganza of far apart "beeps" and "toots", under Feldman's direction at a music festival in Banff, Canada. After a grueling spell of trying to conjure the right balance of austere notes and carefully-sculpted silences from a virtually blank score, a gruff Brooklyn accent boomed from the darkness of the empty auditorium, it was a remonstrance to the

**"Cage [left] introduced
Feldman to ideas of
indeterminacy and graphic
notation, a musical aesthetic
which liberated his
creativity"**

conductor "Your shoulders are too expressive!" None of the players could tell if Feldman was being serious or parodying himself. This is taking understatement to an extreme, of course, but therein lies the beauty of Feldman, or rather Feldman's music.

A central element of the Feldman legend is the stark contrast between the man and his work. Michael Finnisay remembers him as "this huge, fat, ugly guy with this raucous voice, out of whom came this music of exquisite refinement. It was the sort of music you'd expect to come out of some sort of embroidery queen." Chansmoking, diabetic and nearly sightless too, one might add. And also enormously charming and attractive to women.

Feldman has had his supporters in Britain ever since Cardew and Tibury took him up in the late 60s. In 1986, a year before he died, he taught for two weeks at the Dartington Summer School, where the composer Andrew Toovey got the chance to study with him, after years of following the music of the New York School from afar.

"He was there in this little village — Totnes, Devon — devoted to whatever it was we were doing. He was very ill and very overweight. He would stand at the piano for hours and rattle away, telling the same stories again and again." The encounter spawned Toovey's ensemble icon, named after a work by Feldman, which was founded with the original aim of playing Feldman's music, because no one else seemed to be doing so.

A common element in Feldman's British reputation since the late 60s has been the role he played as a musical guru. "We don't have any of those figures over here," Toovey says. "If we do, they don't live here. [Brian] Fennelough lives in California, [Harmon] Birtwistle lives in France [Michael] Tippett's not really around either, is he?" Toovey looks with dismay at the posthumous fame Feldman is now acquiring, particularly in Europe, where, he says, "A tradition is growing up of how you perform Feldman — very slowly and with a lot of atmosphere. It's happened very quickly." Recently, there has been an avalanche of Feldman releases on CD. The Kronos Quartet has released *Piano And String Quartet*. The Group For Contemporary Music issued a recording of the 1979 *String Quartet*, and the Swao Hot Art label has put out half a dozen recordings by Feldman's University of Buffalo ensemble of Eberhard Blum, Nils Vigeland and Jon Williams. Art abhors a vacuum. □



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Now, more than ever, the real action in the music industry is happening down in the shadows where the **Small Independent Labels** live, issuing records that ignore the fluctuations of music's global economy, and creating their own agendas by adhering to those time-honoured vanguard notions of innovation and experimentation. Over the next three months, we will be alerting you to the identities of what we think are the most adventurous and pugnacious independent labels of the moment, beginning with the following. . .



independents

Labradford

Blast First

Named by founder Paul Smith in homage to UK modernist Wyndham Lewis's literary journal, *Blast*, and formed in 1985 to release Sonic Youth's *Bad Moon Rising* album, Blast First soon established a reputation as a UK outlet for underground US noise-rock (it also issued early and still influential records by Dinosaur Jr and Steve Albini's Big Black). After a period of relative inactivity in the late 80s/early 90s, the label has now re-emerged and re-emerged, pursuing a more open-ended agenda, often in tandem with *The Wire* (last year, the label and this magazine combined to make available CDs by Sun Ra, Glenn Branca, Phil Niblock, Ensaizende Neubouten and others). 1994 also saw Smith curating the monthly Disobey club, which served as an extension of Blast First's A&R policies, creating a live space that could accommodate Autoclave's New Complexity Techno, free jazz saxophonist Charles Gayle and Apocalyptic culture poet Stewart Home, usually on the same bill. Perhaps more than any other UK label, BF is helping document music's current, transgressive passage into new, borderless zones. **Choice cut:** *Various Artists, Deconstruct* (Distrib: RTR/Prinade)



Blood & Fire

In the wake of dub's resurgence as the paradigm for a whole generation of studio experimentalists (working in Jungle, Ambient, post-rock, etc.), a slew of labels are now emerging to reassess relics from the music's short but intense Jamaican history. On-U sound's new Pressure Sounds imprint, ROIR's Danceteria offshoot. Most notable among these is Blood & Fire, curated by Steve Barrow, a long-term advocate for and commentator on JA culture. Bankrolled by Simply Red's management, B&F releases make available long lost classic cuts from King

Tubby, Yabby U, Keith Hudson, Horace Andy, etc., transmitting their original analogue one-drops and echo chamber odysseys into pristine digital sound, and framing the tracks with the kind of evocative, textural packaging usually reserved for art house projects. **Choice cut:** *King Tubby, Dub Gone Crazy* (Distrib: Grapevine)

Clear

Although it has only issued three 12" singles in its brief lifespan, Clear, founded by two ex-employees of Richard James's Rephlex label, has established itself as a lightning rod attracting the most adventurous spirits in UK electronic music. Jed Knights (Global Communication), Plaid (Black Dog), Tusken Riders (u-no) — and future Clear artists will include Wagon Christ and Bedouin Ascent. What distinguishes Clear from the truckload of other UK electronic labels is the way it gives these artists space to expand their music beyond the now restrictive notion of Intelligent Techno, tapping into the links that are being threaded through the fences separating Jungle, Electronica, Ambient HipHop... **Choice cut:** *Plaid, "Angry Dolphin" EP* (Distrib: RTR/Prinade)

advice

For 4 Ears

European free improvisation should seem a less beleaguered genre if it recognised that its experiments into the outer reaches of sound, technique and instrumentation now has parallels in a host of supposedly more 'fashionable' musics. If any Euro Improv label is in a position to make that ideological leap (one already made by US

labels like Chicago's Complacency), it is perhaps this Swes operation, founded by drummer/electronics technician Günter Müller in 1990. To date, Müller has released 16 albums that have combined his interests in free jazz, live electronics, sound installations and satellite-linked, trans-national multimedia events, with Christian Marclay's turntable cut-ups, Jim O'Rourke's guitar drones and The European Chamber String Quartet's avant garde chamber music, among others. **Choice cut:** *Müller/O'Rourke, Slow Motion* (Sevnechtweg 16, CH-4452, Itingen, Switzerland)

God Mountain

Owned by Japanese musician Hoppy Kamiyama, who was dropped from his contract with Toshiba after releasing an album that featured a cover shot of him posing as a bare-breasted transsexual, God Mountain has become the most rabid advocate of the extreme fringes of Far East underground/pop culture (with the possible exception of the equally unhinged PSF label). God Mountain releases by Otomo Yoshio, Optica's Rums, Dem Sem Quaver, Tipographic, Desecrating Table and others feature frenzied, babbling jump cut collages, or Grand Guignol updates on the 70s Prog rock of King Crimson and Magma, the 80s downtown New York Improv scene, etc. God Mountain groups tip the conventions of their source materials right over the edge into sonic representations of *fin de siècle* information overload and glock. **Choice cut:** *Various Artists, New Kinnerevich* (Distrib: Impetus)

Kranky

The group that coalesces around this Chicago label — Labradford, Jessamine, Silver Jews — have more in common with the post-rock analogue mantras of UK groups such as Man and Bark Psychosis, than the shambolic, DIY, kitchen sink symphonies of the so-called Lo-fi groups (which inform many current perceptions of America's 'alternative' rock underground). Sharing sensibilities with a number of Chicago related-based labels and groups (Drag City, City Slang, Tortoise, Gastr Del Sol, brise glace), Kranky releases are prime examples of how the notion of the drone has been adopted as a flexible organising principle for creating music by a new generation of musicians with backgrounds in more traditional rock settings. Here is one place where you might find the bizarre offspring of minimalist post-punks from AMM to LaMonte Young. **Choice cut:** *Jessamine, Jessamine* (PO Box 578743, Chicago, IL 60657 USA)

Moving Shadow

The ascension of Jungle from lurid backroom activity to nerve-centre of digital innovation can be traced in the history of Moving Shadow. Instigated five years ago by Rob Playford (who partners Goldie in Metalheads, now with major label backing), the label has been responsible for some of Jungle's most often-quoted epiphanic moments: Ormi Trio's "Renegade Snare", Foul Play's "Open Your Mind", and singles from Blame and EZ Rollers. Their companion LP *The Joint* was one of the first such meeting points for a scattered assortment of anonymous, limited-run white labels and dublates, now they are instigating the first single-artist albums (Ormi Trio's *The Deepest Cut* was a *Wire* Winner last month). The same outfit has established Section 5, a shop on London's King's Road — one of the few places in the country where you actually have a chance of tracking down those hard-to-get discs. Obscurity stops here. **Choice cut:** *Ormi Trio, The Deepest Cut* (Distrib: SQD)

Mo' Wax

Tri-Hop — a dumb phrase, and one which conceals some of the most compelling, as well as some of the duldest, studio-based music currently extant. Mo' Wax, founded by



Christian Marclay

PHOTO: BLOOMSBURY



Aki Nawaz

wunderkind DJ James Lavelle as a kind of self-consciously 'hip' post-Acid Jazz exercise, has mutated into the archetypal TopHop label Lavelle's disingenuous attempts to overstate the 'experimental' nature of the Mo' Wax roster can't detract from the innovations of the records he issues by DJ Krush, Howie B, Skull, UNKLE and others, all of which draw heavily on HipHop's potential for constructing sampladelic ambience, playing down its lyrical terrorism (For original source material, look to the instrumental mixes you would find on the back of 12" singles issued by labels like Wild Pitch in the US, and Cold Sweat in the UK, during the mid- to late 80s.) Mo' Wax's graffiti-inspired sleeve art (rendered by Ian Seft) further underlines the way the label fetishises and mythologises New York HipHop's 'Old Skool' golden age (ie early 80s), while Lavelle is currently looking to expand the label's outreach (not to mention hip cachet) by forging links with drum 'n' bass raders such as A Guy Called Gerald and LTJ Bukem. **Choice cut:** *Various Artists, House* (Distrib: RTMPinnacle)

Nation

Co-founded by Aki Nawaz (ex-Southern Death Cult, currently leader of agit-prop rappers Fun-Da-Mental) and informed, perhaps, by the bohemian, multi-culti atmospheres of its Notting Hill location, Nation is the label that has almost single-handedly reversed the notion of World Music, rescuing it from the clutches of cosy PC travelogues, and instead downloading a gritty amalgam of African, Asian, Middle Eastern and Eastern European musics into the studio expanses of dub and HighPop. Core members of the Nation stable include Trans-Global Underground, Asian Dub Foundation, rustlers HC, Loop Guru and vocalist Natacha Atlas — fusion masters for a brave new world, as the label puts it. **Choice cut:** *Loop Guru, Dunyo* (Distrib: RTMPinnacle)

Staalplaat

'Steel plate' in Dutch: objects which this idiosyncratic label (it has connections with like-minded US operators Mulemood and Soleilmood) has been issuing since 1985 (previously putting out small-run cassettes). Their releases are fine art projects as much as anything: Geert-Jan Hobijn works in close cahoots with his design team, Antone Busanik and Piona Tan, and CDs are only released if they feel that they have a visual concept that will gel with the music (one of the most elaborate being a CD wrapped in parchment, bound with a ribbon sealed with wax). They favour music from



Faust's Jean-Hervé Peron

the zone where industrialists and sound experimentalists are on the point of breaking away from their genre confines, blending other textures and approaches into the mix. **Choice cut:** *Rapson, Father Gods* (Distrib: Voltage)

Table Of The Elements

Their catalogue numbers are taken from the periodic table (so dealers find themselves ordering "Sodium", "Hydrogen", etc), and you can tell it's a TOTIE release — it's the one that looks as though it's been left outside to rust. Since the 1993 release of Zeena Parkins's dream-harp epic, *Nightmare Alley*, label boss Jon Maltz has set in motion a train of transcendental interconnecting chronologies. Involvement in America's just Intonation Network put him in touch with violinist Tony Conrad, leading to album projects with the arch minimalist and seminal Krautrockers Faust. A ring-round of Maltz's guitar heroes produced the Guitar 7" series, bursts of sound from Derek Bailey, Keith Rowe, Keiji Haino, Lee Ranaldo, Jim O'Rourke and others. All this came together in 1994, when Maltz found himself organising the Manganese Festival in Atlanta, hosting AMM, Faust, O'Rourke, Conrad and Haino in a deuced factory. He now plans to release the first Faust studio LP in 20 years, plus records by Gaeil Del Sol and Keiji Haino. **Choice cut:** *Tony Conrad & Faust, Outside The Dream Synthesis* (Box 5524, Atlanta, Georgia 30307, USA)

Unknown Public

Who knows the secret of the brown paper box? Each edition of *Unknown Public* (live to date) contains a CD packed with new recordings of contemporary and avant-garde compositions and electroacoustic experiments, as well as a confidentiality-typeset booklet with essays, explanations, letters and contact information. All contributions are welcome and included on their own merits, but the CDs have included (relatively) bigger-league artists of the order of George Benjamin, Nicolas Collins, Ben Neill, Simon Fell, Michael Finnissy, Michael Nyman, Kevin Volans, etc. An outspoken (and audible) alternative to an increasingly grey and blinkered mainstream classical press. **Choice cut:** *Various Artists, UP-4: Musical Machinery* (Freepost, PO Box 354, Reading RG2 7BR)

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Mark E Smith

Tested by Dave Haslam

One of the most wilfully independent figures in British music in the last 20 years, The Fall's Mark E Smith remains an outsider and maverick. He formed the group in Manchester in 1977 while he was working at Salford Docks as a customs clerk. First heard making a contribution to the 10" compilation album *Short Circuit Live At The Electric Circus*, the group has gone on to release an album a year ever since, as well as taking part in numerous side projects such as providing music for the dancer Michael Clark. Fall cover versions testify to Smith's broad music tastes, ranging from 60s garage punk to 70s disco hits, and on the new album, *Cerebral Caustic* (Permanent), a version of Frank Zappa's "I'm Not Satisfied". Smith is both The Fall's one constant presence and its charismatic focus, delivering his pitiless lyrical chronicles with a withering sneer. The group currently also contains two drummers, plus bass player Steve Hanley, who first joined the group 16 years ago, and Smith's American wife, guitarist Brix, with whom he has reunited after several years of estrangement. The jukebox took place in the central Manchester offices of The Fall's Cog Sinister label.

CAPTAIN BEEFHEART & HIS MAGIC BAND "Mirror Man" from *Mirror Man* (Castle Communications)

(Almost immediately) Captain

Beeheart... and on guitar
It's some kind of out-take, I think.

It's "Mirror Man". The Captain used to look [The Magic Band] in a room until they got it right. The drums follow the guitar parts instead of the bass part like usual rock. I like Captain Beeheart. I got *Strictly Personal* because it was a budget LP. When you're poor and taking acid, *Strictly Personal* is the one. There was no alternative in those days, and it was 99 pence. I like all his stuff before he went to Virgin, all the 65, 66 stuff is really outrageous, and a lot more jazzy. *True Mask Replica* is a brilliant LP.

What appeals to you about it?

It's like nothing on earth. It's free-form but with discipline. There's a method behind it. The Magic Band worked hard, you could tell that. And The Mothers Of Invention did too, I used to think they were better than Frank Zappa actually.

JOHNNY BURNETTE TRIO

"Drinking Wine Spo-De-O-Dee"
from *Rockabilly Boogie* (Bear
Family Records)

I've got this by The Pirates... What is it?

It's Johnny Burnette.

Johnny Burnette. Jukebox great. He wrote "Jingle Bell Rock" which we were going to do on *The Word* at Christmas, funny enough. Johnny Burnette's great. This is recorded on one mic, you can tell. Guys like Johnny Burnette, they thought that Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley were sell-outs. That's the mentality they're coming from.

Singing songs about the pleasures of drinking wine all day was outlaw activity in 1956.

For sure. Speed freaks. I love rockabilly. The ones I've got are just one-offs, compilations. I got one for my birthday, all the classic trucker songs. It's got "White Line Fever" on it, and "Caffeine, Nicotine And Benzadine" is one of the tracks. I always buy that stuff when I'm touring America. We always go to the truck stops because you can get the best food there, and the tapes they sell are amazing.

This sort of sound is still alive there?

You won't get any Suede cassettes in those joints, no.

NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS

"Helpless" from Various Artists:
The Bridge (Caroline)

Nick Cave or Bono or someone?

Nick Cave, it's a Neil Young song.

It's a Nef Young cover version? What's it called? "Hopeless?" [Laughs] The Bad Seeds always play so slow. It's just slack. I've been to so many Bad Seeds gigs like this. And I've never liked Neil Young's stuff. I used to class him with James Taylor and all those other nuisances. They killed rock 'n' roll. I find it hilarious, all these groups aged 21 and their favourite LP is *After The Goldrush*. I used to go to parties and trash that LP when I was 16. It was the enemy.

ELVIS PRESLEY

"American Trilogy (Medley)" from *Elvis At Madison Square Garden* (RCA)

"Disco" by Elvis Presley (Elvis whoops and *Smith laughs*) It's a comedy number, he's taking the piss. The best stuff of this period [early/mid-70s] is things like "Suspicious Minds" and "Poke Salad Annie."

This is part of a medley.

And it's terrible. One of the worst things he ever did. He's obviously on drugs, and he feels he has to keep connecting with his roots, but the band are bored to death. I was always a big fan of Elvis. The first Sun LP used to keep me going for months, and at that time you weren't allowed to like Elvis because he was fat and a fascist and all that crap. I used to say it doesn't matter; if you like it, you like it. You don't have to look like Elvis or behave like him. People have lost that, now you've got to look like what you like. And the next one is a prime example of that... .

MORRISSEY

"National Front Disco" from *Your Arsenal* (EMI)

Morrisey, isn't it? Is it new?

No, it's old. It's "National Front Disco". I've never heard it before. [We sit trying to make out the lyrics]

He seems to have a fascination with rough boys.

I'll say this, all cloners have a fascination with Nazis. That's a fact of history. It's like the Hitler Youth in their little shorts. I've got no fascination with rough boys, I put one on crutches last week!

Whatever the sentiments in the song, the music is so dull, and even more reactionary than the lyrics. Session musicians. Such a shame. The Smiths broke up, just as they were getting good... I don't identify with that English thing about being fascinated by rough types and skinheads and that. I

can't relate to it. It's funny because I'm usually seen as that kind of hoodlum, working class idiot, but I think they're all cloners. I don't have anything to do with them.

The myth is that football hooligans, or whatever, are somehow more authentic. Well, anyone can go to Dublin and cause trouble. What makes me laugh, they cause trouble in the softest parts of the world. They always start in Copenhagen or Amsterdam, or they're tough in Dublin. In Dublin they'll let you into a match without a ticket, they're so nice and easy-going. The Italians had them sorted out. There was no trouble in Italy because the Italians told them "If you run our game of soccer, we'll machine-gun you." It's easy to throw a few sticks at some Dublin kids, pseudo-hardcores, like bouquiers or something. I have this trouble with road crews when I'm on tour; they get to Amsterdam and they have a bit of pot and see a few prostitutes and they go off the wall. It's embarrassing.

Morrisey defended this song by saying,

"I don't think black and white people will ever get on." It's bollocks, isn't it?

THE BUZZCOCKS

"Boredom" from *Spiral Scratch EP* (New Hormones)

[Immediately] The Buzzcocks. Best song they wrote.

And when punk arrived in Manchester how did it affect you?

I saw The Buzzcocks and I thought, I better form a group. I can do better than that. I actually remember coming out of the gig at [Manchester's] Lesser Free Trade Hall and thinking that. Did you consider The Fall a punk group when you started?

No, we were into garage. We were punk, but not as it was known then. Our idea of punk was mid-60s. The Kinks, The Seeds. Well, my idea of it was anyway. The Buzzcocks were very good, better than The Vibrators and all that shit. They had an aware garage touch. Also they paid for our first recording.

PUBLIC ENEMY

"Bring The Noise" 12" (Def Jam)

I quite like Public Enemy. I like the slower ones, funnily enough. I like N.W.A., they're very sparse and hard. This, to me, has no content. I used to buy rap compilations. The early rap stuff was quite good, they used to talk about

ghosts and original subject matter, like in Northern Soul. Now it's all about, I've got a car and I fuck lots of girls. It reminds me very much of reggae. Reggae in the late 1960s was fucking great, just at the interim period between bluebeat and Rasta it was excellent. And then there was Bob Marley and Island Records and Virgin Records and it got all technical and it just lost it. Prince Buster was great, Big Youth was great. They were hard

VELVET

**UNDERGROUND
"Rock 'N' Roll" from *Live MCXXXIII* (Sire)**

[Immediately] "Rock 'N' Roll" by The Velvet Underground. From 1969

1993, live in Paris.

1993? We played Glastonbury with them and this was the best thing they did, but I didn't like them at all. I think Lou Reed was doing a lot of money, to be honest, and you can't blame him for that. I'm a *White Light/White Heat* person — one of the best LPs ever made. I don't like Lou Reed's recent stuff, too topical. The thing about Lou Reed is that he was dead simple and original, but now he's talking about Third World Wars and CND and he doesn't suit him. I wouldn't knock him, though, I think he's great. I think he's just got fed up with being ignored. You used to have to really hunt for a Velvet Underground record in Manchester in 1972 and 1973. In the 70s, Eric Clapton would be selling millions of records, and The Velvet Underground couldn't get in the Top 200. That seemed to fuck him up. I don't blame him. I would be outraged.

CAN

"Pinch" from *Ege Bamyasi* (Spoon)

It's Can isn't it? Off *Togo Togo*. Off *Ege Bamyasi*. It's "Pinch". It always clears the room at parties when I put this on. It's fucking marvellous, the drums are great. It's a great LP. All their drum beats are like wave music, or disco, it really fucking moves.

Your song, "I Am Danno Suzuki" (off *This Nation's Saving Grace*) what was that about?

It was about Can, and [the group's Japanese vocalist] Danno as well. He's a good mate of mine now, actually. He doesn't believe in making records anymore. He still plays, but he makes

cassettes, he makes about three cassettes and he sends one to me. He still works with Jake Liebeck on the drums. If we play Cologne or Essen or somewhere he comes to see us play. He's one of the heroes of mine who've actually lived up to expectations.

ORBITAL

"Philosophy By Numbers" from *Snivilisation* (Internal)

[Two minutes of foot-tapping] I've no idea.

Orbit.

Is it? I like Orbital. They remixed "Middle Class Revolt", they were halfway through it but I put a stop to it. They're good, Orbital, but too machine-orientated. There's no human feel.

What current music do you listen to?

Just Italian rave really. It's got a lot of guts to it. Visnadi and stuff. The thing about stuff like this is that you can hear it's been done by a machine and you can tell there isn't going to be anything coming up. They should use technology to make it heavier, that's what I want to do. The problem with this is that they're not musicians, they're DJs. They don't really know much about studies and they don't really respect musicians because they're used to working with Primal Scream. The Drum Club were like that. They did tracks for us, but I didn't want it released. It was just a machine and me in the middle going "middle class revolt". It's not like you're in a studio and you've got to record it. People like Johnny Burnette knew that, professionals. He'd just put the mic there, put the amp at this level, and do it in one take. Now you go in a studio and it's like *Star Trek*; it's like going into the Starship Enterprise.

SCARFACE FEATURING ICE CUBE

"Hand Of The Dead Body (Goldie Remix)" 12" (Virgin)

It's great that. Great sounds. The bass sound is excellent. What is it?

Scarface, a Goldie mix. It's hard to hear *Jungle* like this anywhere; you have to search for it.

Yeah, and you go to clubs and the DJs don't even know what the records are, it's all white labels. It's good, it puts the shit up the corporates. This is excellent. You'll have to do me a copy. ☐

charts

Playlists from the outer limits of planet sound

PHOTO: ANDY WILLOW/RED



The Boredoms

Rough Trade 15

Gastr Del Sol — Maria Asper (Drag City)
Boredoms — Super Roots 3 (WEA Japan)
Oval — Systemisch (Mile Plateaux)
Tortoise — Why We Fight 7" (Soul Static Sound)
Harry Pussy — Untitled 7" (Planet)
Caffeine — OST (Okkado)
DJ Krush — Yeah (Alex Reece Remas) 12" (Mid Wax)
Wagon Christ — Rosseck 12" (Rising High)
Hels Cline — Parts 7" (Ecstasy Peace)
Scanner — Full Fathom 12" (New Electronica)
Carl Stalling Project — Volume Two (Warner Bros)
Photek — Water Margin 12" (White Label)
Pierre Bastien — Musique Machinales
MEV — Live 94 7" (Stomachache)
Patrick Pulsinger — Dogmatic Sequences 12" (R&S)

Compiled by Danny, Rough Trade Shop, Nea's Yard, London

On The Wire 15

Labi Tzavre — Barnako (Cobalt France)
Little Axe — The Wolf That House Built (Wired)
Skip James — 1931 (Yazoo)
Earth And Stone — Kool Roots (Cha Cha)
Prince Far I — Under Heavy Manners (Joe Gibbs)
Various Artists — Deconstruct (Blast First)
Creation Rebel — Historic Moments Volume II (On-U Sound)
John Coltrane — Live In Seattle (Impulse!)
Massive Attack Vs Mad Professor — No Protection (Circa)
David Torn — Tripping Over God (CMP)
Muslingmaize — Sakaam Alekum, Bastard (Solemoon)
Various Artists — Even Harder Shade Of Black (Pressure Sounds)
RL Burnside — Too Bad Jim (Fat Possum)
Horace Andy/Augustus Pablo — In The Light/Dub (Blood And Fire)
Various — Sam Cooke's SAR Records Story (ABKCO USA)

Compiled by Steve Barker, On The Wire, BBC Radio Lancashire, Mondays 8-10pm

Big Chill 10

Funk! Porcain — Bubble Bubbi (Advance DAT)
Wagon Christ — Throbbing Rouch (Rising High)
O Yuki Conjugate — "Sunchemical" from Equator (Staalplaat)
Nev Katz — "Wild Horse (Global Communication Mix)" from Never Mind The Distortion (Victor Japan)
Deep Space Network — "A Pulse D'Orange" from Headshot (Source)
Esquivel — Space Age Bachelor Pad Music (Bar/None)
Manna — "Mr Echo (Go To Hell)" from Manna (Apollo)
Dub Tractor — "P Phase 5T" from Boredom Is Deep And Mysterious compilation (April)
Sle & NPI Ratio — Deep Blue (Pussyfoot)
Massive Attack Vs Mad Professor — "Cool Morson" from Karmacom EP (Circa)

Compiled by Peter Lawrence, The Big Chill, Chiswick, London



The Office Ambience

Oval — 94 Descent (Mile Plateaux)
Arthur Russell — World Of Echo (Rough Trade)
Various — Escape Velocity Routes From The Jungle (Circa)
Invisible String Quartet — Entonic (Slam)
Aphex Twin — Ventolin EP (Warp)
Laurie Anderson — The Ugly One With The Jewels (WEA)
Milton Nascimento — Clube Da Esquina (Hermisphere)
Andrea Parker/David Morley — Angular Art EP (Infonet)
John Zorn/Fred Frith — The Art Of Memory (Inoue)
Various — Growthings Symposium Harriet (Hermis)

Compiled by The Wire Sound System

Five Most Commonly Scanned Phrases

"No, you promised to ring me"
 "Do you love me enough to come and see me?"
 "Laters" ("Clunk")
 "No, you put the phone down first. No, you put the phone down." (etc)
 "Have you got the spiff?"

Compiled by Robin Arnould/Scanner

Fred Frith

PHOTO: JAM KILBY

sound check

April's choicest CDs and albums — reviewed, revered, reviled

April winners:

Laurie Anderson, Arditti Quartet, The Fall, German Junglists

In soundcheck:

Apache Indian, Aphex Twin, Band Of Susans, The Boredoms, Anthony Braxton, Don Byron, Creation Rebel, Flying Saucer Attack, Robert Fripp, Fred Frith & John Zorn, James MacMillan, Pete Namlook, The Orb, Pan-African Orchestra, Pavement, Howard Riley & Keith Tippett, Terry Riley, Seefeel, Scorn, Suicide, Tricky, Papa Wemba, Hector Zazou and more...

In brief:

Club trax and music's outer limits



Laurie Anderson

PHOTO: AUGUSTIN BONACHEARY

WIRE WINNER

consulting storyteller

Laurie Anderson
The Ugly One With The Jewels
And Other Stories

WEA 9362 45847 CD

With a new Laurie Anderson record, a regular part of the fun is to suggest where it might fit. *The Ugly One* is no different. Described as a live album, it could sit happily — if conspicuously — on the shelves for 'talking books', the now hugely popular way to take a dose of literature. It could be marketed as 'Laurie's Book At Bedtime'.

The Ugly One was recorded at London's Sadler's Wells last year. Anderson based the performance on her *Stories From The Nerve Bible*, a career-retrospective scrapbook also

published last year. The stories are accompanied by 'interludes' in which Anderson sets a story's scene. These are in fact as much part of the show as the tales themselves and, apparently, as carefully scripted. There is also incidental music that's not incidental at all.

The simplicity of *The Ugly One* might surprise those who presume that every Anderson project is grandiose. The stories have a similar tone to David Byrne's 'true stories' of strange, everyday America. One describes a Texan woman who, flying for the first time, thinks the plane has entered outer space. There is also an interest in things spiritual: tales of a tussle with a Ouija board, for instance, and the passion of Anderson's Baptist grandmother. What makes the stories particularly amenable to a performance-reading is Anderson's involvement (somewhat similar to Spalding Gray's in his filmed

monologues). This makes for an autobiography in fragments.

Much of what distinguished the show from a routine recital survives on the album. In terms of music, if you're after a tune or something to dance to, leave well alone. Instead, we get local colour — appropriate wildlife cries when she revisits a trip to the Pacific, for instance — and more insidious synthetic squiggles that act as quizzical punctuation. Best of all is Anderson's voice. *The Ugly One* would be a hopeless endeavour if she couldn't hold a story. That she manages to be both laconic and permanently dazzled — the arch space cadet, perhaps — is some achievement.

ROBERT YATES

WIRE WINNER

18 string salute

Arditti String Quartet
From Germany

MONTAIGNE MD 782035 CD

Arditti String Quartet
From Vienna

MONTAIGNE MD 782027 CD

This crew can do little wrong. Over the last 20 years, they and Kronos have created an audience for contemporary quartet composition almost entirely on their own. Sadly, Kronos seem to have abandoned most genuine quartet music in favour of novelty numbers, at least in live performance, maybe their commitment to the mainstream repertoire was always questionable. But the Arditti are still at the modernist coal-face, grinding and slashing away, their appetite for new sounds undiminished.

It's clear that they live and breathe the music on these discs. The work by the

soundcheck

four young composers on From Germany has some rigorous, though not always audible, organisation behind it. The quartets that stand out are by York Hölzer and Walter Zimmermann.

Hölzer, probably the best known of his generation of German composers, was a student of Stockhausen and associate of Boulez. It's perhaps a mark of the decline of the Serialist hegemony that such a talented successor isn't better known. His *Angthon* moves a live quartet with its sounds transformed on tape. The counterpoint that results — hence the title, meaning 'call and response' — is very compelling. The curious baroque interludes, subtended by the taped sounds, make this the most captivating and eventful music on the disc.

Walter Zimmermann's spare, simple-sounding *Festino Lento* (a medieval motto 'make haste slowly') is based on a wealth of philosophical allusion and intricate calculation, from the tuning system to the proportions of the movements. The slow moving textures gradually draw the listener in, the brief second movement produces sounds strangely reminiscent of those radical avant-garde. The *Clangers* it's not till the long final movement that dramatic gestures break through.

From *Vieno* is more of a curiosity. It's a rather bewildering array of miniatures by an A-Z of composers from Gilbert Arny to Hans Zender — 30 of them, none more than four minutes long — dedicated to Alfred Schlee of the classical music publishers Universal Edition on his 90th birthday. I found it rather indigestible — best to play a few tracks at a time. So maybe the *Arctica* can do something wrong — though the error is a trifling one. Their series of recordings for Montaigne to which these belong is a landmark in contemporary music.

ANDY HAMILTON

WINNER

garageband goldfish

The Fall

Cerebral Caustic

PERMANENT PERM 30 CD/CCLP

I lost the thread of The Fall story some 15 years in, around the time of the useless *Code Selfish* (1992). Listening to *Cerebral Caustic*, I realise that doesn't matter so much, not because The Fall

history is a linear, unchanging thread (it isn't, but it's very easy to assume that things with them always stay much the same), but more because it's cyclical. Stick around with the band long enough and you'll often get to the same point again, or somewhere quite like it. They drift in and out of fashion, from hot moments to lukewarm to hot again, even old members from way back (Martin Bramah, Karl Burns, et al) have a way of rejoining the fray briefly, then vanishing again. And the danger of being a long-term reviewer of Fall records is that you end up saying the same thing about them year after year, trying to explain just what their elusive quality is (no one should ever write about them more than twice, preferably at ten-year intervals).

Cerebral Caustic is a good place to pick up the story again. It's the most garagey, scrappy pop-sounding thing they've done in years — they never quite convinced me in their dabblings with bargain-basement House — and that may have something to do with the return after all these years of Brax Smith to guitar and California screaming. It's tempting to imagine Mark E. Smith and Brax as the Burton and Taylor of the indie world, and to see the energies of *Cerebral Caustic* arising from whatever concealed domestic story there is here. But one way or another, this record sounds as persuasive as anything The Fall have done since their Beggars Banquet years.

Oddly, MES takes a back seat in terms of presence, although he's the only person to be depicted on the sleeve — tracked out in feeding domino and angel wings. The rants are more contained than usual, and he only really connects with audibility for the chorus hooks. Much of this sounds like prime singles material, which could be partly to do with the way several of the tracks have a familiar quality about them — "One Day" has an element of rockability throwback to "Fanny Jack", "Feeling Numb" jumps straight into "Cruser's Creek" mode. There's a neat sight of hand in the programming: the improbable chirpiness of "Lute Just Bounces" gets instantly overwritten with a cover of Frank Zappa's "I'm Not Satisfied", which comes in deep jaundice yellow. You probably only need to be reminded every five years or

so that The Fall are still out there on their inexplicable own, but *Cerebral Caustic* does the job — a welcome brain abrasive just when it was needed.

JONATHAN ROMNEY

WINNER

barbarian breakfasts

Various Artists

Rough And Fast

RIOT BEATS 9 CD

All my anxieties about Jungle's upworldly mobile drift towards dubious concepts like 'muscularity' and 'maturity' seem to be on the verge of becoming horrendous reality. You've got artists utilising 'real' musicians, punters who lappraise tracks in terms of how 'clean' their production is, and a burgeoning mutual appreciation pact between the Mo'Nas posse and the drum 'n' bass intelligentsia. All the new styles in what must be termed 'post-Jungle' are ultra-smooth and melodiously mellow — from 'herndest', with its luscious hi-hat shuffle-beats and tastefully restrained soul diva passion, to the fusion-tinged serenity and long sustained synth tones of the LTJ Buena school. Don't get me wrong, these developments are still generating astonishing music. But sometimes you've got to wonder: whether Jungle's mania, madness, ruffness?

For that, you might look to the UK's happy hardcore scene, which has backslashed to 9.2 in order to follow a different path than that taken by drum 'n' bass, as floating on staccato synth-bats, rush-accelerating piano riffs, helium-shrill vocals and stomping 4/4 beats. Or you might check out Germany's small but fervent breakbeat scene, as represented by *Rough And Fast*. Based around a handful of labels, Germanic Jungle has more of an explicitly political edge than its British cousin. Key figure Alec Empire, of agit-Tekno combo Atari Teenage Riot, released a Jungle track called "Hunt Down The Nazis" (appropriate given that Jungle is all about musical miscegenation and post-colonial cultural hybridisation).

Doubtless by necessity, German Jungle is less polished and fluent than current UK fare, but in a way that only adds to its raw appeal — there's a fierce inflexibility, an unswerving rigour, to the drum programming that's curiously inglorious

at a time when so much UK drum 'n' bass verges on funk with breakfasts. Much of this compilation harks back to Jungle's underrated 'dark' phase of early 1993, when hardcore producers were first messin' with fucked up rhythms but the music still retained some relation to Techno (specifically, the brutalist style of Joey Beltram).

And so DJ Moonraker's "Lion King" and Space Cube's "Dark Dive" both let up bass-blast synth riffs (redolent of the Frankfurt-based POP labels' brand of stormtrooper Tekno) amid the jittery, shimmering breaks, while Roland 303 Acid squiggles are woven into the hyper-syncretised bustle of Sonic Suburbs' "Dungeonsat" and Dr Echo & DJ Reverend's "Fine Style". And on Doc Tom's "Hostile" there's a terrific ear-searing synth nose that, yep, sounds like a squadron of mosquitos due bombing upon your flesh.

As with most non-Anglophone appropriations of Britpop there's something slightly wrong-sounding about the results: just check those names — Doc Tom, Sonic Suburbs, Mental Bombin, DJ Reverend! But the best tracks here — the itchy 'n' scratchy insectoid scabble of "Biotbreaks" "Hey The Funk Be With You", the prehensile rhythmic intricacies and gamelan-textured percussion rolls of Da Captains Of Future's "Legendary Fight" — suggest not just that the Germans may soon catch up with their UK brexibers, but that Jungle's nest and most interesting phase will involve regional hybrids across the globe. G-Funk, Jungle, Miami drum 'n' bass, Latin breakbeat, Scandinavian New Complexity, Ardore.

SPION REYNOLDS

soundcheck

Alphabet Soup Lay'n' Low In The Cut

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CD: IMP CD 18219 / MC: IMP C 18219



**JOHN LAW & LOUIS MOHOLO:
THE BOAT IS SINKING... APARTHEID IS SINKING**

Louis Moholo: drums/percussion
John Law: piano
recorded live during the 'Freedom Tour 83'
CD: IMP CD 19322 / MC: IMP C 19322

Recorded live, this release combines the talents of two master musicians. John Law has attracted acclaim for his performances, his solo and group recordings with the Jon Lloyd Quartet. Louis Moholo should need no introduction; from the original Blue Notes to recent duets with Cecil Taylor his work has been characterised by its honesty and creativity.

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soundcheck

freemform jazz, funk and rap can also be heard in the work of other regional contemporaries such as Souls Of Mischief and the whole Hieroglyphics posse. The Pharcyde and Freestyle Fellowship, but Alphabet Soup's frottage of jazz fusion and Hip-Hop has a revisionist effect on each of these musics.

The loose grooves of slack funk tighten against the iconic raps, the bass pumps with an aggression and directness portended by Hip-Hop, and the guitar licks steer a steady rhythmic course. Conversely, the lyrics roam beyond the boundaries of the narrow Hip-Hop lezography into the territories of spoken verse and poetic chanting. Sometimes the band glides, stretching a safety net of grooves for the sophisticated microphone skills, elsewhere the vocalists keep schtrumm and leave the musicians to jam among themselves.

This mixture of old and new allows the group to touch on a wide range of reference points. During "Zone", the off-key melodies, ethereal keyboards and chocolate bass echoes the refined funk of Roy Ayers, while the calm repetitions of chorus and verse owe something to the styles of Gil Scott-Heron and Michael Franti (of Spearhead). Most of the album is shot through with a sense of melancholy. The rappers deal with issues of poverty, racism and fatherlessness, their frustration occasionally bubbling up into Public Enemy-style ranting while the musicians play in streams of blue beneath them, sometimes recalling Chet Baker's coolest moods.

JAKE BARNES

George Antheil/Henry Cowell/Leo Ornstein The Bad Boys

HAT ART ART 6144 CD

George Antheil Sonatas For Violin And Piano

MONTAIGNE P107802022 CD

Avant gardes are designed to provoke debate. They're also useful to look back on once controversy has cooled. Not because the mere passage of time operates any kind of filter — a complacent notion, since it actually requires activity (discussion, reviews, exhibitions, broadcasts) to establish

Further consumer info: labels not named in this column should be available at good specialist retailers or, increasingly, in high street megastores like HMV, Tower and Virgin. In emergencies, contact likely distributors such as These, RTM, Impetus, Recommended, Vital, etc. . .

Montaigne: through Koch International

Prawn Song, Riot Beats: through SRD

Hat Art: through Harmonia Mundi

Permanent, Warp: through Pinnacle

Fax: through Pinnacle Import

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reputations — but because those who are ignorant of history are condemned to repeat it. For example, how do those 20s 'bad boys' of the piano — Leo Ornstein, George Antheil, Henry Cowell — measure up today?

Ornstein was a conservative trained virtuoso who, one day in 1913, felt compelled to compose a baroque thrash sonata called *Danse Sauvage*. He used it to cap his recitals of Chopin and Scriabin, inciting riots, controversy and press. The impresario Martin H. Hanson made him a star on successive European tours. Then (as now) the great selling point was 'crossing boundaries': classical music injected with the 'mechanical barbarism' of jazz.

In his autobiography, *Bad Boy Of Music*, George Antheil tells how he got his own big break: he read in one newspaper that Hanson was going to Europe, and in another that Ornstein had left his management. Antheil at once went home and worked up a thunderous technique; then, auditioned Hanson gave him the job. Antheil went down a storm in Europe too, and found an enthusiastic supporter in Ezra Pound, ever to be relied on to talk up some propagandistic tripe about music (or politics).

However, as Peter Wilson points out in his sleeve note, the commitment of Ornstein and Antheil to 'modernism' was superficial. Both quickly returned to the neo-classical fold. Today, even their 'iconoclastic' pieces sound like squibs. Left out of the limelight, it was Henry Cowell who pioneered the techniques that led on to Cage's prepared piano; his pieces have an intriguingly naive, non-classical openness to sound that shows up the sterner pomp of the others.

Further evidence of the triviality of Ornstein's talent (and his debt to Stravinsky's *Soldier's Song*) can be found on the sonatas included on the second of these two releases and played by Reinbert De Leeuw. De Leeuw also performs today's 'bad boys' Louis Andriessen and Steve Reich like Ornstein and Antheil in their day; these composers are currently considered 'ultra-modern', but musically are just as in thrall to tradition (The true heir to the Ornstein/Antheil tradition, though, has to be Andriessen's protégé Steve Meiland, with his pumped-up muscled, 'provocative' statements designed for publicity brochures, and insipid

academic compositions.)

Although musically uninspiring, these three discs constitute useful evidence of the fluff considered 'radical' in past decades: a salutary lesson for South Bank publicists operating today.

BEN WATSON

Apache Indian Make Way For The Indian

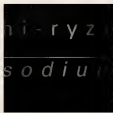
ISLAND CD B016 CDMPLP

Last summer I had to play a lot of table tennis as part of the job of mixing an album by The Frank Chickens. The studio had a pool table, of course, but the album was more of a table tennis thing. Anyway, who should turn up at the studio to record some vocals but Apache Indian. He very politely asked us to stop the ping pong, which was in his live room, so that he could record. And here is that very song, "Born For A Purpose", track seven on the new album. It's the most introverted track of this collection, and the best tune.

Two years ago, Apache's "Arranged Marriage" was released: an extrovert and complex hit single. Not only because it was the first piece of Indo-Birmingham-raga, or bhangramuffin, to burst into the charts, but the record itself boasted a production awash with cunning ideas and pop tricks, playing with the stereo spectrum and studio's sense of scale.

For the new album things are more serious, the sound is stripped down and harder, and six out of ten tracks feature 'ghat beats and crazy dope sounds' from young Hip-Hop producers The Press. Apache has lowered the pitch of his voice and worked on that larynx-frazzling raggamuffin growl. He tends to rap rather than sing, and if he needs a sung chorus he brings in a guest, notably Frankie Paul or Brian and Tony Gold. The result is a spacious production and time, love and money have clearly been lavished on the backing tracks. Except that Apache then fills up a lot of the space with the heccting monotone that I associate with booming car stereos cruising round Tottenham. There are a few beautiful choruses, especially "Born For A Purpose", and the title track has an MC Hammer tongue in cheek flair, but personally I wouldn't mind a bit more songwriting and musical daring.

CLIVE BELL



Aphex Twin I Care Because You Do WARP 30 CDJLP

In spite of the fact that the music of Richard "Aphex Twin" James is now mostly shorn of its place on the dancefloor, stripped of its habits in the sepiatones of the nation's Ambient rooms, and only tangentially related to recent notations of isolationism, it still makes for joyously uneasy listening.

With the quizzically named *I Care Because You Do*, James seems to have also severed connections with the Ambient Techno context that gave birth to his popularity and drifted gently over to side with the new wave of breakbeat experimentalists. The contrast with, say, "Xtal" or the legendary "Heliosphair" from the first *Selected Ambient Works*, two tracks with palimpsests of breakbeats flecked through their structures, couldn't be much greater. "Cow Cud Is A Tern" could sit, smug and serene, alongside anything on a Mo'Wax compilation, while "Wax The Nip" and "Start As You Mean To Go On" both pulsate violently with Electro-Junglism. If there's a crucial divide between James's current output and the exponential torrent of Junglist, Trilobyte and dub creativity, it's in the former's refusal to play the sampling/past sources game, as if Mo'Wax jazz references had been abstracted and replaced by James's trademark clear-tone melodic architecture.

In a way, James's willfulness is both blessing and curse: the same essentially modernist aesthetic underpins both the pranksterish gestures (most of the tracks here are fragments of anagrams of Aphex Twin, like "Wax The Nip," or "Wet Tip Hen Ate"), or the familiar idiosyncratic

invented words) and what comes across as his creative austerity. As with many other d.i.s.t.o. Electronica obsessives, James is so focused on the manufacture and crafting of the music, that the sheer richness of tone and structure imposed on the overall totality of the music's impact. Even when, as here, he is paying more attention than anyone else within Electronica to the tune as well as the tone of a track, there's still an almost unaccountable sense of lack at the heart of his music, a radical closure that is, once again, both creative virtue and aesthetic vice.

JAKUBOWSKI

Dr Atmo, Pino & Wildjamine A Day In The Park FAX PS0852 CD

Charles Uzzell-Edwards & Pete Namlook A New Consciousness 2 FAX PW18 CD

Hi-Ryze Sodium GPR 10 CD

Ever since the Italian Futurist Luigi Russolo published his 1913 manifesto *The Art Of Noises*, the debate over the value of environmental music has raged. Now that notions of electroacoustic composition are resurfacing, this debate has acquired new significance. The nature of the music on *A Day In The Park* is revealed/betrayed by the CD cover art — a computer-generated landscape. This is environmental music for the virtual world, little or nothing organic is present. Apart from a few

sampled voices, the emphasis is on the synthetic and the artificial. The CDs' three digital soundscapes are full of dark, brooding passages and swirling clouds of sound, but they're constrained by their own artifice. The "effectiveness" of any environmental sound lies in its ability to evoke a particular situation or circumstance. Virtual environments can be altered at will, by the mere click of a mouse. Thus, any attempt at musical evocation cannot help but succeed. In the meta-world, there are no fixed reference points. *A Day In The Park* could be a day anywhere.

A New Consciousness 2 is a modern urban version of *musique concrète*. Composed largely of location recordings made in Frankfurt — rattling trains, echoing footsteps, chattering voices — the environment is placed firmly in the foreground. The musical content is minimal and simplistic, and there is little sense of "progression." A small number of motifs, both percussive and melodic, recur at various points, but on the whole they're subordinated to the environment in which they're placed. Abstract sounds materialise fleetingly in the mix, other times mingling with the urban background noise and seeping into your consciousness more gradually. At one point, a clicking percussive phrase registers in your brain long after it has actually commenced, producing a sensation familiar to anyone who lives or works — and listens to music — in an urban area. An excellent integration of the natural and the artificial, this is one of the best Fax releases to date.

Purporting to portray a nocturnal journey through city streets, Sodium (the work of Uke's Dave Campbell, now trading as Hi-Ryze) contains as little of the natural-world as *A Day In The Park*.

But where that record attempts to produce a simulacrum of a particular location, this merely uses locale as a source of inspiration. So this journey is an impressionistic one, made more vivid by the power of auto-suggestion. By informing the listener of certain facts, and relying on his/her own powers of imagination, Campbell allows himself the space to play around with the "reality" of his music. The sounds themselves bear no relation to the environments in which the track titles place them. After "In The Night Kitchen" to, say, "In The Airport", and the listener would conjure up a completely different scenario. This is an extremely accomplished album, ranging confidently across a wide range of styles.

PETER MCINTYRE

Babkas Ants To The Moon SONGLINES SG1505 CD

Teetering on the line between composition and free improvisation, the New York City trio of Brad Schoepbach (shimmering, biting electric guitar), Brigan Krauss (looming alto sax with a fat tenor sound) and Aaron Alexander (laibrie, pointilistic drumming) recalls the instrumentation — if only occasionally the style — of Paul Motian's group with Joe Lovano and Bill Fissell. More often, Babkas have a postmodern tendency to play inside quotes and parentheses, though more abstractly than, say, John Zorn. "Rocky And Rachel" has a feeling, loquacious circus feel. The short title track juxtaposes relaxed, atmospheric pillows of sound with Krauss's jittery, swirling lines, his only composition here fits from a pseudo-mariachi/cabaret theme snippet to fragmented funnies, to serpentine, interlocking sawtooth lines, to a burst of



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soundcheck

free jazz fury

Schoepbach gets the vast majority of the compositional time, favouring off-kilter rhythms and quirky melodies resident of Ornette Coleman, a soundtrack to a dark-humoured, existential cartoon. All in all, Babkatz's second album is tight and refreshingly unclimbed, lyrical in an intricate, thoroughly modern way.

STEVE HOLZJE

Band Of Susans Here Comes Success

BLAST FIRST BFFP 114 CDLP

After ten years of persistence, Band Of Susans have arrived. Ambient has changed the atmosphere. The group's exalted guitar timbre has been taken up as the premier post-rock sound, the tone and texture of a piece of music can now supersede its form in popularity as well as avant-garde zones, cultivated tension is an accepted aesthetic to Sturm und Drang harmonics, etc. Ambient has popularised these experimental techniques which, a decade ago, The Susans blended with their own rock sensibility.

With *Here Comes Success*, the group infuse their Fender fury with Electronics' sense of space. Utilising dub mechanics as a template, tectonic chunks of sound overlap, shift, then drop out, rifts fit between channels in holographic pos de bois. Fewer interlocking layers and more pronounced drumming aerate the band's signature drones and fluctuating tones.

Success's multilayered make-up has further ramifications: the album possesses the potential to introduce a new generation of rock fans to avant-garde techniques of sound production. Klaus Schulze and Pete Namlook's 1994 collaboration on Fax, as well as recent releases on Blast First and Bill Laswell's trinity of labels, reiterated that Ambient and the avant-garde are structurally similar. Yet in New York (The Susans' hometown), the avant scene remains secular and self-referential. As Sonic Youth once did, Success could render that cloistered scene — and its ideas — accessible (even commercially viable) without compromising the genre's — or The Susans' — intelligence and integrity. Yet one more way to measure success.

JULIE TARASKA



Boredoms Super Roots 3

WEA JAPAN WPC 27513 CD

Those UK Boredoms watchers who could afford the hefty whack that was demanded for the WEA Japan issue of the group's 1994 album *Chocolate Synthesizer* were rewarded with a free 'Not For Sale' Sampler 3rd CD entitled *Super Roots 2*, the official follow-up to *Super Roots* (which was released both in Japan and the US, but not over here). Both of these CDs featured a series of typically scrambled rock sensations from Yamatsuka Eye and company, who sounded as though they had laid down the bulk of the recorded material after a mad shopping trip at their local branch of Toys 'R' Us. *Super Roots* and *Super Roots 2* demonstrated the reverent side of The Boredoms, with plenty of squeaky toy improvisation, freeform punk growl and the occasional bugle blurt from drummer Yoshimi to keep the top-slated atmosphere of the recordings stumbling along.

Super Roots 3, however, is another dash of sushi altogether: a mammoth bout of skull cudgelling, grinding riffs that climax with a howl of anguish. *Super Roots 3* also manages to be The Boredoms' most organised record to date, with much activity behind the sonic curtain of noise.

The virtuosic brutality of the playing shifts into several different gears to create an almost 3D vibration. The effect is quite astonishing, an aural mantra which hints at the minimalism and volume of early Terry Riley and La Monte Young. The group resist making a big show of this feat, however, and soon they shift again to create a piston pounding punk rock engine that is being driven to its very limits. When it finally explodes, the silence that follows is equally deafening.

Although this is hardly the best place to start for those new to The Boredoms' incendiary music (for that, hold out for *Chocolate Synthesizer*), it represents a defiant surge forward from a group who continue to enthral, surprise and baffle anybody who thought they had rock 'n' roll sussed.

EDWIN POINCHIE

Anthony Braxton Composition No 174

LEO RECORDS CD LR 217 CD

Anthony Braxton's creative

achievements appear at a tremendously fast pace. Some of his more ambitious works may remain unrealised beyond their written forms — works for multiple orchestras, works to be performed on different planets, music to heal deserts. Besides his tangible and well-documented redefinition of the traditional jazz quartet, we must be grateful for the occasional opportunity to see other facets of Braxton's Grand Scheme.

This release provides one such opportunity. *Composition No 174* is a piece for percussion ensemble, slide projections, constructed environment and a tape of male speaking voices. The elaborate story which unfolds over steel-pan percussion describes the fictional snow-clad terrain of Avaland. With sickly sincerity, a public address system issues cautions and guidelines for interesting alternative routes through Avaland. The narrative is complex, non-linear, and peppered extensively with map co-ordinates in at least four dimensions. It hints at the unique features of many locales and a variety of human characters (both holidaymakers and tour guides) while the shifting topography of the landscape is illustrated by the ensemble's glacial severity, occasional impending danger, thundering avalanches, the agitated mental noise of crowds, the gleaming snow on the trees.

Many questions remain: Is this Braxton's vision of the future? If so, then despite the amazing array of options open to visitors to Avaland, there is something clinical and sinister in the prevailing feeling that 'everything is planned with your convenience in mind'. Nevertheless, humour and a certain amount of self-deprecation on Braxton's part is discernible. "I hear Donald Trump is building something in this area," says one tour guide. Are the multimedia story forms offering an accessible gateway into Braxton's music for a more general audience? Certainly, if you bear with it through the 45 minute performance you can become immersed in Avaland and acquire a mind-set receptive to this and other possible futures.

Anthony Braxton is a visionary informed principally by an awareness of a particular continuum (from Charlie Parker to Stockhausen) but also by Scientology, chess, metaphysics and

Blast First: through RTM/Pinnacle

WEA Japan: through Rough Trade Shops

Leo: through Impetus, Cadillac, These

Arache: through Vital

On-U Sound: through SRD

Egyptian Mystery traditions. Blink again at his audacity, his preposterousness, his consistency and unique vision, the way he sidesteps the fads and fashions of local time and fuels the fire of self-determination.

PHIL INGLAND

Don Byron

Music For Six Musicians

ELEKTRA Nonesuch 7559 79354 CD

This album opens with a recitation by poet Sadiq gazing the US establishment's tokenistic recognition of black achievement (it is called "White History Month"). It also gives the bird to such postmodern epigones as

"Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and the likes of Foucault." As ever, Don Byron is hip to the latest in musical and political thought.

The sound is clean and classical; Hans Wendt's production is gliding, surreal. Byron understands the potential of clave rhythms to underpin Stravinsky-like modernism. However, despite the presence of Jerry Gonzalez's fervent congas, the feel of the music — sharp intervals, bright chords, hard angles — is closer to the academic clarity of Milton Babbitt or Steve Reich than it is to the funky sweet of a Cuban descarga session. Byron's clarinet has the chilling, piercing quality of Courtney Pine's (rather under-celebrated) soprano: a stringing precision that shrugs off the blues and wails of "close enough for jazz" sloppiness. He shows a deeper appreciation of Eric Dolphy than the "tribute" brigade (Donald Harrison, David Jean-Baptiste), like Dolphy. Byron pursues jazz beyond its function as American Heritage Restaurant Music to broach a third stream between ethnic rhythm and classical abstraction.

Byron's earlier *Tuskegee Experiments* was more brazenly abstract. In playing rumbas or the blues (or the twee cha cha cha at the start of "Crown Heights"), there is a danger of Byron's sedate sounding smart-ass rather than virtuosic. The unaccompanied clarinet on "La Estrella" — unlike, say, an Anthony Braxton equivalent — sounds too like a music student's exercise to convince. "The Allure of Entanglement" borrows from Sade's over-used Gymnopédies and air-brushes itself into kitsch corner. On the other hand, "That Sucking Sound (For Ross Perot)" collages conflicting

elements and provides a springboard for some truly astonishing interactions. Too often, though, the idea of abstracting New Orleans jazz results in mere cleverness; an acoustic version of the fidgety baggas beloved of M-Base's Steve Coleman and Steve Williamson. You miss the headlong involvement and Sun Ra-derived sensuality that you get from a musician like Craig Harris, another New Orleans modernist (and a previous Byron employer).

Don Byron is a string clarinetist and one of the most astute minds working in jazz; his musical and political ideas are consistently original and provocative. In *Music For Six Musicians*, though, his dialectic between tradition and transgression is in disarray. Maybe he is too busy watching the postmodern antics of labelmates Kronos and Bill Fissell: he has not got a feel for the Latin rhythms he patronizes — his slumming sounds precious. You miss the spiky challenges that made *Tuskegee Experiments* so arresting.

BEN WATSON

Creation Rebel

Historic Moments Volume Two

ON-U SOUND ON-U 74 CD

Scorn

Ellipsis

BARACHE MOSE 111 CD

Dub's irresistible dislocation of time and space was fully released on Creation Rebel's spinebending 1979 testament to displacement, *Storship Africa*, a visionary conjunction of Afro-futurism and mix-logical hypnosis which constitutes the bulk of *Historic Moments Volume Two*.

According to the album's producer Adrian Sherwood, pragmatism played as large a part in the proceedings as studio wizardry: he later admitted that the backwards motion characterising the sessions occurred after "we turned the tape over, because the rhythm wasn't steady enough." The record's sequential "Space Movements 1-9" offer hallucinatory glimpses of a largely chaotic epicentre of molten keyboard chords, scrawny percussion, reversed bass lines and descending snarls. Structural pitch shifts and blurred momentum leave only fleeting spectres and stray clues as evidence of where the music comes from. Still as

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mysterious now as it was in 1979, the only recognizable point of contact is the twisted logic that is now familiar to Sherwood admirers following the last 15 years of On-U Sound releases. His shadow looms large over these proceedings like a dark-hearted Magus cooing the winds of change. Unlikely, imbalanced and destabilized, this is alchemy made real.

When dub celebrates the exhilaration of challenging consensus order by turning the song inside out, upside down, back to front and over again, it provokes fear and loathing as often as adoration. Illuminating the fragile nature of inner security, Scorn seem happiest when focusing upon a sense of internal dread. With *Ellipsis* they've jumped ship and sought intervention from club zones. Where their previous albums have revealed in self-imposed confinement — monolithic locked grooves and lynchid claustrophobia to match — their most engaging output has involved the open riddles of the remix. So, *Heavy Blood* and *Deliverance* succeeded through minimalist treatments and gratuitous excess respectively, and now *Ellipsis* shines by allowing outside light into their wifely dark tunnel visions.

Germ and Coll pull their allotted tracks to pieces, yet the awards for the most alien interpretations go to Jack Dangers and Bill Laswell. Dangers's raunchy 303 injection and headbunk assault feeds "Silver Rain Fell" through the machine, a seismic rumble with a crystalline sheen. Laswell instils dread with monstrous beats, his dub mastery has been given the right ingredients to gorge upon. *Evanesence* was a brilliant record, but *Ellipsis* eclipses its light by going one step further and submitting to dub's machinery.

K MARTIN

Flying Saucer Attack Further

DOMINO WIG 20 CD

Dissolve

That That Is... Is (Not)

KRANKY KRANK 005 CD

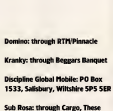
Further may come as a surprise to those who've been seduced by Flying Saucer Attack's roaring guitar sounds. The Bristol duo's second album proper is still sweet with abstract waves of feedback and unfathomable noise, but this time they're



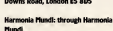
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battering at folkloric pastorales with Rachel Brook and David Pearce intoning sweetly over acoustic guitar picking. This meeting of saccharine and caustic sounds works well at times, but sometimes it seems so blunted that it points back to the introverted psychedelia of Chapterhouse. Slowdive and their fellow 'shoegazers' in the early 90s.

"To The Shore" is the most arresting track, with patterns of echoes colliding with metallic clatter and cymbal loops, but PSA need to work on their insular sounds more unless they're prepared to suffer an attention bypass. Surely they're the literal embodiment of so-called 'isolationism' rarely playing live, recording at home, and unlike most of the genre's representatives, never seen logging at the ICA's Electronic Lounge.

Dissolve are another guitar duo, this time from New Zealand, and *That That Is... Is* also sounds like it was recorded at home. Again, it's minimal — in fact an application of Cartesian logic to the absurd title suggests that to listen to the album proves that it doesn't actually exist. Luckily there's more substance to it than that.

The tracks on *That That Is...* build from skeletal structures, often based around a handful of chords with melody lines slowly and deliberately coiling around each other. There's tension in the thorny, scratchy sound, with judicious use of echo and even backwards guitar. After a few listens, it becomes compelling, hypnotic — qualities exacerbated by the nagging repetition and the tracks' incomplete, sketch-like quality (which you are left to resolve). The nearest they get to pop songforms is on "Dissonance" and "See The World", but even here the melodies are ghost-like, ectoplasmic, distant memories.

DAVE MORRISON

Robert Fripp 1999: Soundscapes — Live In Argentina

DISCIPLINE GLOBAL MOBILE DGM 9402 CD

Few, if any, critics have stressed the importance of improvisation in the work of Robert Fripp. By improvisation I don't mean the type of limbering up/jamming that rock musicians might do in the rehearsal room or on stage prior to a gig, but a determined decision to improvise as an end in itself in the context of a live performance or in the recording studio.

No Pussyfooting (1973) with Brian Eno, *Starless And Bible Black* (1974), *Red* (1974) and *The Great Deceiver* (1992) with King Crimson, the solo projects *God Save The King/Under Heavy Manners* (1980) and *Let The Power Fall* (1981) all these releases featuring Fripp include a significant number of improvised pieces, though they are never regarded as improv by those who discuss them. Why? Because those pieces were not created by 'recognised improvisors' and because Fripp's albums receive the kind of marketing and distribution associated with commercial popular musics. So they rub up against the Improv scene's inverted snobbery. Likewise, his innovative, solo guitar improvisations ('Frippertronics') are unlikely to be mentioned in the same reverential breath as the work of 'recognised British Improv guitarists' like Derek Bailey, Keith Rowe, John Russell and Fred Frith, though Fripp is no less inventive a guitarist than these musicians, nor are his improvisations less distinctive.

'Soundscaping' is a further development of Frippertronics — one electric guitar and a pedalboard of multiple effects units. Fripp has used soundscaping techniques in recent collaborations with David Sylvian, *FFWD>>*, The Grid and with his own *String Quartet*. However, 1999 is the first album to feature its use in solo live improvisations. The 16 minute title track arcs towards a dense, searing crescendo of multi-layered sustained tones, not unlike parts of György Ligeti's 1966 composition for organ, *Volumen II*. "2000" mimics minimalist tendencies to a kind of microtonal Romanticism, where mass and volume reach a powerful stage before subsiding, while the lush, sometimes formless textures of "2001" recall Bowie's "Hoss Garden", or is it "Subterranean"? These are ambitious pieces, their panoramic tone colours as grandiose and dramatic as an evening sky, but Fripp's craftsman-like control of the technology, his sure sense of pacing and exciting use of multi-layered, contrapuntal developments ward off possible accusations of pomposity. Whatever other genres are attached to this album, remember that first and foremost these are real-time compositions, and by one of Britain's most original yet still underrated improvisors.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

Fred Frith/Marc Ribot
Sounds Of A Distant Episode
 SUB ROSA SR68 CD

John Zorn/Fred Frith
The Art Of Memory
 INCUS CD20 CD

There's supposed to be a reason for everything, so how come not everything is so reasonable? Consider the subtitle to Sub Rosa's *Sounds Of A Distant Episode*: Its slogan, "Reinventing The Guitar", could stand proud on a Hans Reicher release, and could once have done the same during Fred Frith's most exploratory period as the rock guitar's radical deconstructionist (he embraced the disposability aesthetic by making guitars out of sawn-up bookshelves, which could be abused in all manner of ways), but much less so now given Frith's re-endorsement of the instrument in its more conventional form. Here, such an epithet comes across as ill-fitting and contrived.

Reinventing the guitar's language is more to the point, and this Frith has done with aplomb. The confidence of his playing rings out clear on both acoustic and electric guitars, both platforms feature on this collection. No part of the guitar is left untapped: it may be just a plink of wood with strings on, but Frith's playing draws you both to the delicate grain of the wood and the steely precision of the instrument's make up. Ribot's contributions to this debate never really develop much of an argument. Ribot is a band man, solo, he's exposed horribly (see "Minczar", a drowsome live "duet" with Ribot playing guitar and horn simultaneously). The other four cuts use his band Shrek as a soundboard against which to splay his guitar tones, but the results lack pose or focus. Wholly different from Shrek's recent *Avant* release, on which Ribot's group were so game for a good tune.

The release of a recording of Frith and John Zorn from a Victrola festival appearance years ago has been talked about before, then abandoned. Then, without prior warning or ceremony, this CD turns up on Derek Bailey's Incus label. The *Art Of Memory* is nostalgic in the very best sense. Neither Frith's electric guitar nor Zorn's also sax want to close Derek Bailey and Evan Parker respectively, but they are playing to a notion that a lot of us — both pro- and

anti-factions — have about free improvisation, particularly its wily abstract language.

Frith's playing sometimes echoes his mid-70s Guitars Solo sound, rough cut and yet harmonically effusive. Zorn also spares the occasional hindwings glance with his alto's birdlike chatter and speed-out flutter-tonguing, and yet neither player sounds like anything but himself.

It is with these plays on stylistic devices that *The Art Of Memory* ultimately wins you over. Never mind the agility of Frith and Zorn's responses and the sharpness of their combined focus (both consistent throughout), this album is a vital chapter in free improvisation's Great Learning. From the source to the source. Essential.

DAVID ILIC

Georges Kazazian
Sabil
 HARMONIA MUNDI 13034 CD

Abad Azrié & Pedro
Aleto
 HARMONIA MUNDI 13029 CD

Born in Cairo of Armenian parents, Georges Kazazian is not an all-out revisionist of the Arabic classical tradition. He is, however, an innovator. To unaccustomed ears, *Sabil* will probably sound unexceptional, but that would be akin to describing Charlie Parker's music as Trad jazz. To these ears' passing acquaintance with the splendour of the Arabic, and especially Egyptian, classical tradition, *Sabil* is a stimulating development. The unison playing gives way to counterpoint and harmony — at times Western, at others Armenian. Impromptu solos are taken in a manner reminiscent of post-bop jazz — more personal and confrontational than in traditional music — an impression reinforced by the presence of a plucked double bass. Thus, though the flow of the music remains very controlled, Kazazian's style is the dynamic focus. The playing on *Sabil* has great finesse and it should be heard by anyone interested in the tradition it enriches.

Next to Abad Azrié's *Suete* virtually all other musics seem to pale, fade and disappear. The first time I played it was in company. All conversation in the room

stopped. Later, as I listened in solitude, it became clear the shock would be repeated many times before *Suete* could become a familiar comfort, and that even then all its mysteries could never be totally uncovered. Abad Azrié, a Paris-based Syrian composer who is also the producer and main singer here, has teamed up with fellow-country Pedro Aleto for this unearthing of erotic texts by the medieval Arabic poets of Andalusia — a culture at the source of both flamenco and classical Arabic music. But leave the *(fluson)* word at the door. This is an attempt to recreate a long-gone past, not through vain attention to archaeological detail but through a total and utterly successful abandonment to instinct.

What unites Arabic and flamenco music more profoundly than any number of technical similarities is the importance of "duende" or "tarab", a cry from the soul, a quasi-mystic state of song-induced trance which reveals the true heart of the performer to both master and the listener. Whether duende or tarab, *Suete* (which translates as "fortune" or "late") breathes it. Azrié's supernaturally male voice is answered by Aleto's higher register, each in his own language addressing a mystic apparition of a woman, an all-powerful dispenser of felicity and despair. "In your hands: life and death, malefaction and deliverance."

You could spend many worthwhile hours tracing the spellbinding qualities of Azrié's impeccable orchestrations, his otherworldly delivery and the refined passion of both the Arabic and flamenco ensembles on display. There is no surprising *Suete*.

STEVIE HALLAZAR

James MacMillan
Busqueda/Visitation Sepulchri
 BMG/CATALYST 09026 62669 CD

Smartly packaged and a smart coupling of devotional works from the initial and latest phases of James MacMillan's compositional pre-eminence offering many points of comparison and contrast, which makes it all the stranger that *Busqueda* (1988) is placed second, after *Visitation Sepulchri* (1993).

Busqueda is a work that clearly betrays MacMillan's early debt to Luciano Berio, shimmering and surreal chromaticisms preface a rugged and giddy multi-

voiced exposition (through narrator, actors and sopranos) of the poems of the mothers of Argentina's "disappeared". There is also a greater pan-tonal plurivocality to this earlier music. MacMillan's postmodern purloining swoops on (just) Vangelis's warden mood music moments (thaps, chimes, angelic voices) and strident Latino military band music.

Visitation, for seven singers and chamber orchestra, isn't the music of religious conversion — it sounds just as secular as *Busqueda* but its text (a 13th century Latin Easter play) possesses a firmer, more architectonic structure and a wholly more coherent soundworld. The 40 minutes of this "sacred opera" pass in a twinkling.

MacMillan has now strayed far from the bad-boy billing of his youth. This does, however, make his trademark bomber rads of triple forte brass and percussion into otherwise innocent music seem much more affected and gaudy. It's as though the composer wants to convince us that he isn't blaspheming out of Göreck or Tavener, but in all honesty, the music as a whole informs us of that quite adamantly.

Performances? First rate, even Juliet Stevenson manages to bring off the difficult narrator's role in *Busqueda* with dignity. Ivor Bolton's conducting of the wilder and woolier terrain of *Visitation* is, frankly, mesmerising. MacMillan's star is still climbing.

PAUL STUMP

Morphine
Yes
 RYKODISC RCD10320 CD

How much fun can you have with a power trio that lacks a guitarist? Quite a lot by the sound of things. Morphine give us bass, drums and saxophone with heaps of attitude. 'Yes' is full of snaking bass lines and loud saxophone riffs, the songs being stripped down to their bare essentials. Most are punky, driving R&B variants, with deep, gutsy vocals.

Morphine appear to make a virtue out of the limitations of this set up, keeping everything taut and bubbling under. On some tracks the saxophone riffs percussively, like a downbeat. James Brown brass section. Elsewhere the band take on a bluesier, more laid-back approach. The lyrical slack in trade is mainly non-sense irony, from the

soundcheck

obsessional stalker narrative of "Whisper" to the deadpan lust of "Super Sex". There are a trio of more 'experimental' songs on the latter half of the album that are not entirely successful. "The Juny" is a 'surreal' spoken word piece, as if Tom Waits had narrated "The Green Grass of Home", "Sharks Patrol These Waters" is delivered as an admonishment against a background of grinding sax, and "Free Love" is like Black Sabbath's "War Pigs" done as Grungey jazz metal.

"Gone For Good" closes things on a beautiful, melancholy note, sax and bass eschewed in favour of an acoustic guitar. This does not, however, dispel the general air of low slung, sleazy R&B conjured up by the rest of the album. Morphine come on like The Cramps' slicker cousins, their irony and choice of weapons more exotic, but from the same dark, trashy heart.

TOM RIDGE

The Orb Orbs Terrarium

ISLAND CD8037 CD/M2/2LP

On first hearing, Orbs Terrarium represents something of a step back for The Orb — or a welcome return to form, depending on your opinion of last year's *Pomme Fritz*. Gone is the click and whirr of the distressed machinery apparent on that album, to be replaced by the Ambient flow-motion of such works as *UFO80*.

Further listening, however, reveals a somewhat different scenario. Orbs Terrarium is every bit as user-hostile as *Pomme Fritz*, albeit in a much subtler way. The album carries that distinctive rhythmic drift that dominated their earlier works, here, however, it comes very little else. There's very little sense



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Big Cat: through RTM/Pinnacle

**Buda: Naturi, 22 Playbridge
Square, Goring-By-Sea, Sussex
BN12**

Matador: through Vital

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of melodic development. It's as if The Orb are attempting to push their sound to its rhythmic and percussive extremes to compensate for the emphasis *Pomme Fritz* placed on sonic abstraction.

One link between the two albums, indeed between all of The Orb's work, is their choice of superior samples, reaching its apex here on the surreal "Slug Dub". It's a particularly English form of whymy that's on display, suggesting that Alex Paterson has chosen to inherit the mantle of such eccentrics as Vivian Stanshall and Ivor Cutler as much as the more obvious reference points.

Operating in the same way as the *FPWD*>> project, Orbs Terrarium seems an almost deliberate attempt to subvert listeners' expectations. After the polyrhythmic dominance of "Valley" and "Plateau" — and it's nice to hear what these two tracks actually 'sound' like after their initial appearance on the aural mat that was the *Live 93* album — "Odeon Lakes" confounds matters totally, pitching a delicately beautiful piano into an almost weightless space. By the time the rhythms assume prominence, everything's been coloured by those brief low moments, everything seems out of sync. A similar effect is achieved in "Occidental". Where previously, The Orb would have been content to layer dub effects over a percussive/melodic interface, here Paterson and his colleagues are confident enough to strip everything away, sending the listener spiralling mid-track into the myriad synchopations of the echo chamber ethic. It's a bold, brave move, one representative of the album as a whole. Highly recommended.

PETER MCINTYRE

Zeena Parkins Nightmare Alley

TABLE OF THE ELEMENTS TOTE 1 CD

Zeena Parkins/Ikue Mori Isabelle

AVANT AVANT 18 CD

Zeena Parkins is out on her own with her electric harp, all conventions of plinky tranquility thrown out of the window and into the blue yonder. Produced by guitarist Elliott Sharp, with whom she made last year's astonishing *Psychoacoustic* album, *Nightmare Alley* is a solo set for harp and effects. Overload drives the album — dark clusters of notes blur into one another, strings are de- and re-tuned menacingly, and untreated acoustic harp is barely heard. She makes a lot out of the particular noise-making possibilities at her disposal. Some might find such dedicated exploration weaning, but there's great foxy and coherence to the mini-essays she develops. In the end it's classical NYC avant garde — garmoules, multi-faceted, ironic and open.

Isabelle is part of the Avant label's Hip's Road Composer Series and entirely different from the above. It is inspired by the life of Isabelle Eberhardt, a peripatetic turn-of-the-century writer who converted to Islam, married an Algerian and entered a secret Sufi sect. Often dressing as a man, she travelled widely in southern Algeria before dying in a flash flood in 1904 at the age of 27. The piece is scored for piano, cello, violin, electric harp and sampling keyboard, which Parkins uses to incorporate North African folk and religious inputs. Sadly

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there's not much sense of Isabelle's mobility or displacement in the writing. The formal, slightly melodramatic tone is a drag and the textural resonances of the chosen instrumentation limit it. Only with the intrusive otherness of the sampled elements does the piece begin to comprehend the subject matter.

Attached to Isabelle is "Hup!", a 12 minute duet with Ikuu Man inspired by Wonder Woman and assorted comic book heroes. Using electronic percussion, what sounds like a toy pipe organ, electric harp and samples, the two build up a piece of pulsing, irregular vitality. Instead of the action packed cartoonishness one might expect from the New York downtown fold, it's a bare, highly percussive work. In fact, where cartoons impose obviously — samples of manic cackling — nothing is really gained. Mori's jumpy beats work well with Parkins's approach and make you anxious to see how it worked as a dance piece (which is how it was originally commissioned).

WILL MONTGOMERY

Pavement Wowee Zowee

BIG CAT ABB BA CD/CM/LP

Pavement's fourth album lurches violently across stylistically varied terrain. Where *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain* was perhaps a more measured affair, its successor revels freely in extremes. "Fluxus" (Rad), for instance, is a fuzzy guitar-storm thing, an opening squallier, but hot on its heels comes "We Dance" with all its acoustic portentiousness, sounding suspiciously like a pastiche of Dave exhibiting his Jacques Brel fixation — "There is no costration ray" is an interesting opening gambit. Sadly, this little number fades out rather inconclusively, but there are plenty of other, choicer cuts along the way.

"Maybe this is Pavement's blues album "Rattled By The Push", with its prominent slide guitar and harmonics, bears a strange resemblance to early Little Feat, and there are other R&B deconstructions in "Half A Canyon" and "Best Friends' Arm" (Pavement's song titles are always a joy to behold). "Brx Jaw B" (see?) goes for the funk with furious wah-wah and rattling congas, while on "Serpentine Path", the inspired

power pop of The Knack's late 70s hit "My Sharona" is centrifugally dismembered.

The 'Country' stylings of *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain* can still be heard on "Father To A Sister Of Thought", but generally *Wowee Zowee* has a harder sound, reinforced by more impressive musical interplay and dynamics — "Spanco Is A Rag" and "Kennebunk District" are worthy of Some Youth at their most inventive. It's a consolidation of sorts, building on the assured feel of *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain* but also linking musical risks in good measure. It is possibly a less immediately obvious object of desire than the previous album but it provides a kind of benchmark, a confident distillation of Pavement's past and present with some healthy pointers towards the future.

TONY RIDGE

The Percussionists Of Guinea Volume Two

BUDA 2585 CD

The Pan African Orchestra Opus 1

REAL WORLD CDRW48 CD

When local sounds become national and international musics there are costs to bear. When orchestrators, arrangers and managers begin taking command, organisational clarity and conformity can become dangerously repressive to the spirit. However, it also becomes possible to make music of greater breadth and variety than would otherwise be possible. Compare the archetypal acoustic bluesman Robert Johnson with the archetypal urbane bandleader Duke Ellington, how much is lost and gained between the two?

Such issues have always been important in African music, which we too easily think of as a pure outpouring of spontaneity. But one of the major reasons we hear it at all today is because of the state-sponsored orchestras which developed in ex-colonial African states in the 1960s and 1970s. Often these were, and are, run with authoritarian centralised military discipline, and many of the (urban) African groups we hear today descend more or less directly from these tough training grounds.

The Percussionists Of Guinea graduated from the legendary Ballets Africains, one of those state orchestras and also one of the world's great performing bands. By any standards TPOG sound amazing, the incredibly complex maelstrom of noise they create combining the intense improvisatory thrill of village-drumming with a level of crafted arrangement and soloistic technique that would humble most orchestral or jazz percussionists. The severe, all-stops-out sensory pummeling of this djembe drum-based music is so overwhelming I can't listen to more than a couple of tracks at a time. And how do you dance to it?

The Pan African Orchestra have made a good record too, but a more problematic one. The goal of its leader Nana Dango Amam is ambitious — the spryness of Africa's regional styles into a new pan-African classical music, no less. To achieve this, many differences between local styles, tunings and interpretations have had to be levelled (as they were when symphony orchestras developed out of local musics in Europe). The result is a fresh and appealing, clearly African music which also reminds me of Steve Reich and Glen Velez. However, it sounds like a blueprint rather than the final product, and it is only when a particularly exceptional soloist is featured, such as during the beautiful gong-violin and balafon passages, that it truly comes to life.

Maybe the cost of Amam's ambition is too high, for many of Africa's special beauties, individualities and irregularities seem sacrificed to his overarching vision, and less in the interests of artistic development than out of a desire for conformity and respectability. The next century must bring many such attempts to formalise and unify Africa and its music, in fact most major African artists do this already. I would venture that those who will succeed artistically, like Baaba Maal, Toumani Diabate or Gasper Lawal, will be those who aim at the head, heart and feet rather than by achieving academic or institutional respectability. From the evidence of this release, The Pan African Orchestra have not yet decided exactly which way they are going to go, but there is no denying that there is a very interesting journey.

RICHARD SCOTT

Pitchblende Au Jus

MATADOR LTD 102 CD

If there's a single city laying claim to being the US alternative music capital right now, it's Chicago, with its subsidiary connections to different current initiatives, from Shellac to Gaster Del Sol and Brian Jonson, through to Rodan, Tortoise and The Dazzling Killmen. Pitchblende, a quartet based in Washington, DC, fell into Chicago's orbit not just by virtue of employing Gaster Del Sol's John McEntyre as engineer, but because of the aesthetic intent of their refined, unfuzzed Lo-fi Au Jus, their second album, stands as one of the most sophisticated discs to emerge out of that nexus, a bewilderingly alien composite of tightly wound structures and gender, droning passages reminiscent of early Throwing Muses. Like that group, or more distantly The Raincoats (with whom they share a love of reggae bass lines), their compositions move according to an entirely individual songwriting logic. Each verse is spliced into two or three jarringly different segments, each middle eight the occasion for lift-off into counterpoint — or another direction completely. If evidence contrary to the demise of real rock creativity is needed, here it is.

JAKUBOWSKI

Howard Riley & Keith Tippett

The Bern Concert
FMR DB CD

Keith Tippett Une Croix Dans L'Ocean

WICD CD031 CD

We've had the double quartets (Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* grouping), then the saxophone quartets (Rova, WSO), but long before either of those there were the pianists who liked to jam their grands up alongside one another. These instances apart, jazz doesn't go much on exploring the concept of doubling-up or using multiples of the same instrument. Inevitably, then, that pianist Riley and Tippett should have their intermittent get-togethers filed under "C for Curo". It always looked good on paper, both pianists with attitude, cutting their creative teeth on the edge of 60s radicalism. Yet both their lives

soundcheck

collaborations and studio sessions are rare. *The Raven Concert* is by far the best of their three releases to date: the 58 minute improvisation has no enforced break in the middle and none of the intrusive pre-echo that ruined their debut (the vinyl-only *First Encounter*, culled from the duo's first appearance together in 1981).

The most surprising element about it is how much more sense the pairing makes now, strange perhaps given the increasing divergence in their styles of late — it's not just the CD's dynamic superiority over vinyl that separates out their respective contributions more clearly. Riley's return to jazz basics after years as a mildly earnest avantist has given his playing a renewed vigour and great lyrical command; the beauty of his playing lies in how he gradually twists and extrapolates from the melody into something altogether darker sounding.

While it's Riley's performance that leaves the strongest imprint on the structural development of these 58 minutes, it's Tippett who does most to colour the music, excavating treasures from the piano's extremes rather than living secure in the mid-range. This is a coherent and beautifully animated set which reveals the full idiosyncrasy of the players and their absolute respect for each other.

Tippett's solo set, on import from Canada and culled from last year's Victoria festival, steers the impulse closer to folk music than jazz. It reveals the meditative introspection of Tippett at its most concentrated, crystalline tremolo effects ringing off the treble end, billowing clouds humming off the bass, a spatial, considered music which revels in the body of the instrument and the spiritual reflection of the performer. Tippett's music plays on the physical sound qualities of wood and metal, contrasting and overlapping the two in a near timeless journey across moods and moods.

DAVID ILC

Terry Riley In C — 25th Anniversary Concert

NEW ALBION NAD71 CD

In the sleeve notes to a concert celebrating one of the (two) most influential pieces of minimal music ever written (the second, strictly the first, was



**New Albion: through Harmonia
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Pinnacle**

ROIR: through Plastic Head

**Nation, Warp: through
RTH/Pinnacle**

La Monte Young's *Composition #7* in 1960). Morton Subotnick recalls the chaotic circumstances of In C's debut 1964 performance: "The morning of the concert I arrived at the Tape Music Centre (the scheduled venue) and found a notice from the Fire Department, declaring the building off limits. So I phoned our attorney, Jerry Hill. He was at home trying to avoid being served a subpoena by hiding behind the sofa, so our conversation was a bit odd." Hill advised him to leave the front door open. "That way no one will see the notice." Inevitably, a policeman showed up, suspecting drugs and nude dancing. Subotnick showed him some reviews that the critic, Frankfurter, had written about previous Riley works. Exit policeman, confused.

Other people were confused as well. Riley's work — what Nyman called a "genuine ensemble piece" — was an extended canon with a flexible approach to instrumentation and length. It was open to any instrument capable of playing 13 octaves above middle C. Despite the process that each player had to follow, there was room for individual improvisation, which was not to be a feature of other composers writing in the minimalist genre. Each player could choose his moment of entry, while the pianist, as keeper of the single pulse note, had the most meticulous job, playing the same note anything between 6000 and 15,000 times.

Recorded live in San Francisco in January 1990, this 25th anniversary concert imports, as it should do, a sense of occasion. Riley (who, with Mihirun Nisa Douglass, contributes the vocal parts) assembled 30 musicians, making this, I think, the largest ensemble recording of In C yet. It is, at 75 minutes, also the longest by some 33 minutes. Performers include The Kronos Quartet and left-field guitarist Henry Kaiser. In this aspect, this performance is especially true to the spirit of all Riley's work. As a composer who arrived at the avant garde from an improvisatory jazz and performance background, Riley has been reluctant to recognise the boundaries between jazz and classical experimentalism. This recording is also more robust in its interplay of separate instrumental voices, to the extent that the piano pulse takes on an illusionary quality of variance — so, too, the dynamics. There

are some quiet, contemplative moments but the breathless excitement starts an hour in. In Ross blaring and percussive thumping, there's a cacophonous interval that suggests New Year's Eve revels, minutes before the clock strikes twelve. This is followed by a slow breaking-down, until the solo pulse can be heard it was, said Riley at the time, "the Oriental way to get far out."

LOUISE GRAY

Arthur Russell Another Thought

POINT MUSIC 433 891 CD

After figuring for the best part of two decades on the fringes of the New York avant garde, Arthur Russell died of AIDS in 1992. *Another Thought* is a collection of previously unreleased material, dating mainly from the mid-1980s. Collaborating with figures such as Philip Glass, David Byrne and DJ/remixer Walter Gibbons, Russell's work connected diverse strands of pop, disco and classical styles, and while much of *Another Thought* is strikingly sparse and direct (some tracks were left unfinished at his death), there are reflections of this diversity in these tracks.

Much of this album highlights Russell's soulful, sonorous voice set against the stark accompaniment of his cello. It sounds like a meeting of Philip Glass' minimalism with the folk jazz sensibility of John Martyn. "Home Away From Here", "A Little Lost" and "Losing My Taste For The Nightlife" are in this minimalist style, eerily beautiful. The lyrics are simple, straightforward expressions of desire and regret, sometimes bordering on artlessness, but perfect for the unique atmosphere created by Russell's songs.

There is a degree of opening out, as the album progresses, with some brass and guitar accompaniment and programmed rhythm machine tracks adding flesh to the bare-boned musical style. "This Is How We Walk On The Moon" is a stripped-down, pop-dance masterpiece, and "In The Light Of The Miracle" offers up an intoxicating multi-layered arrangement. Really the simplicity is deceptive, and the line between instrumental accompaniment and lead vocals can become blurred, as on "Keeping Up", where the mantra-like chant of the voice and the insistent programming of the rhythm machine achieve a kind of

interdependence. *Another Thought* is the work of a major talent.

TOM RIDE

Seefeel Succour

WARP 28 CD/LP

Something happened to Seefeel between *Queque* and here, and you should probably be glad you weren't there to witness it. Whatever it was, it must have hurt or at least given them quite a jolt. For something has knocked the wonderland enchantment out of their collective skull and left them concussed. Now their little girl lost voicings are less Alice and more the wordless alien emissions of an otherworldly strain, stranded on a rock, shrouded in mists of alluring noise, luring you towards who knows what?

Succour pursues a drift logic to the extent that its indeterminate shapes float across dark watery wastes — and we're not talking dolphin-friendly oceanic here, more silted-up Sargasso stiffness. The group's sound sources are equally ill-defined. Largely gone are the signature guitars. If they return at all, they've been put through so many wars they're unrecognizable. Indeed, the origins of most of Seefeel's noises are equally mysterious. The most impressive rhythmic flumes sound like they were created by freeze-drying amplified flutes and detentions into a dense, greyish lump, which is subsequently shattered into a million fragments and scattered across a tight, reverberating drumskin. Elsewhere, the pieces are powered along by Rheingold-styled metal percussion hammered out from the depths.

Pretty much from the off — well, track two — the eagerness of Seefeel's key tones might be designed to drive away anyone expecting a cozy hour's chiling. The motor drone of "Extract" sounds like it was taken from the whistling pitch of a dentist's drill in the next room. If at first it hits a nerve, the pain disappears once the rhythmic grind begins. Indeed, this is the way much of the disc progresses. The music is propelled forward by the tensions created between the superficially a-musical sound components that comprise the pieces and their irresistible dirt motions. Things are only brought to a halt, ironically, by the occasional static duz, which here

come across like redundant gestures towards dancefloor imperatives. If they're meant as lifelines to anyone floundering in the watery terrains, Seefeel are courageously charting, they're rare acknowledgements from a group who've rightly decided the only way forward these days is to forget anyone might be out there listening.

Seefeel are moving somewhere beyond song, beyond dance. It might not be enchanting as such, but this new Seefeel is certainly intriguing, and where they are going you should very definitely follow.

BIBA KOPF

Sketch Reasons To Sway

RES/APOLLO AMB 4936 CD/LP

Reagenz Reagenz

SOURCE RECORDS 9407 14 CD

As this year passes, certain areas of music are becoming increasingly illegible in electronic music, as contained on these two CDs, the obvious signs which once would have identified a track as coming out of conventions derived from dancefloors (a Roland bass line, say), Ambient Trance, or Industrial noise, are simply not there any more, or rather they have been boiled down into unseen component parts which have the mutable properties of escaping steam.

This illegibility doesn't necessarily mean they're correspondingly inscrutable. It makes you realise how much other music there is which doesn't ask for such heightened degrees of concentration. The identity of Sketch remains relatively mysterious (it's credited to two Norwegians, Tor Jørgensen and Kai Mikkelsen, and there's an assistance credit to Ger Jørgensen of Biosphere), yet that is as it should be for a music that so steadfastly refuses to let you grasp the handle of its personality. Reveling in muscular yet graceful tempo changes, richly evocative tready concoctions of phasing guitar-smeared, tolling dizi-chimes and deep-throated locust-burble, and samples graded somewhere between Third and Fourth Worlds, much of *Reasons To Sway* sounds constructed by spontaneous processes rather than the sequencer's hypnotising click-track. It owes a debt to the post-fusion, pre-everything-that-matters-in-95

recombinators of Jon Hassell and (one more time) Byrne and Enos's *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*. The perplexing question is it's not dance, not composition and certainly not pop, so what the hell is it? And does this feeling of rootlessness come about because of the pair's desire to improvise this music into being from a seemingly infinite choice of source material and method of assembly, or despite it? These are questions which look like taking a long time to answer, and if the asking continues to provoke music as teasing and imitating as this, that's all to the good.

Reagenz is San Francisco's Jonah Sharp, best known for his Fax recordings as Atom Heart. Half of Reagenz was recorded in Frisco, the other half in Heidelberg, and it's tempting to read into it the usual trope that West Coast equals laid-back, sun-kissed vibes. In fact, the project is not so site-specific — the European tracks ("Long Leaves", "Hollow Mountain") are far more expansive, furiously pastoral affairs, while the American tracks ("A", "of", "uf", "B" and "for") are abstract and terse, never able to settle on firm rhythmic decisions. What Reagenz shows, though, is that it is still possible to create compelling, lucid forms of Techno with stripped-down means, and which owe nothing to the clearly defined opposites of motion or stasis that have so far dogged the development of post-rave electronics. Full steam ahead.

BOB YOUNG

Suicide Ghost Riders

DANCETERA/RORIC EUROPE RE 145 CD

Two things. One: that punk, though it liked to think it liked and knew noise, was not always that good at making it. And two: there was no greater badge of pride in those days than to get canned off stage, since it meant you were different enough to frighten the boneheads.

Still, for Suicide, when it happened on a late '70s UK tour with The Clash, it was no new experience. They'd been getting booed in New York for years, ever since Martin Rev first unveiled his damaged Farfisa-throb. Alan Vega's Elvis/leggy sneer wasn't entirely untraditional, but the pulsing shaggle chord-fuzz he paraded on as if he means him ever burst out of the socket boogeying. This was it.

Anyone who already has a Suicide



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record (or tape) will already know these songs — the curdled sprawl of "Rocket USA", the eternal rockabilly ostinato of "Rock 'N' Roll", the crusing Kraftwerkian glide of "Ghost Rider", the grainily ethereal pow-wow of "Dream Baby Dream" and so on. But their studio releases — both called *Suicide*, so as not to confuse anyone — were muted, even tepid affairs, hypnotically pretty, sure, but all too easy to play quietly and not notice your error. You could also think them arty: the second one was on 2x, for God's sake. Any *Suicide* weren't. They were country blues, all but. Or else free jazz, with the wrong instruments and the wrong chops, but thick with deranged soul. Vega's sung babble was never comprehensible, and veered towards self-indulgence often, but Rev's backdrops were simultaneously so disengaged and so loose and so simple that they never seemed to miss. Certainly you'd never know it was a keyboard.

By 1981, playing at the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis (where this CD was recorded), they were ten years old and well recognised, imitated also. All physical dangers were past; only aesthetic ones remained. In fact, there's a glow and a burnished glory to their sound. Synth-pop in after days is weedy by comparison, but then again so are The Clash.

HARK SINKER

Tricky

Maxinquaye

ISLAND BRED 6102 CD/CMCIP

Narcissism and narciss, doubt and interiority, these are the familiar features of indie pop's long reign over the British male psyche. On *Maxinquaye*, Tricky, among other things, eats indie alive, subsumes the qualities — fragility, fluctuation, hesitation, abjection — that sustain its claim to exist.

Enveloping male relapse and psychosis through an associative studio logic that dissolves its borders, Tricky produces a saturation of the black male voice (indeed suffocated binary) that's more haunting and haunted than anything I ever thought could exist. This touches on one of the key events that drives Simon Reynolds's and Jay Press's essential book *The Sex Revolutions* — the move in white rock from racial envy to gender tourism. *Maxinquaye* suggests another



complicated chapter in which black kids raise the stakes of racial tourism while booking into a single room at a gender resort modelled on Prince as well as PJ Harvey blueprints. If Tricky, like AR Kane, Acaze and early Earthling, secedes errantly from orthodox black realness, then underlying that is the pleasure of sonic escape from racial imperatives altogether. Which is just another way of hearing a black presence becoming unrecognisable, unaccountable, unlocatable, truly new.

Immersed in and destabilised by indie as much as HipHop or dub, *Maxinquaye*'s digital alchemy, its wayward suturing of these elements, becomes the setting for the cryptic fragments and rumpled maps of Tricky's crumbling psychic states. The record's drugged states come from the Cypress Hill/Ultramagnetic MCs' mood of ultraviolet dreamstate slowed down into post-B-boy paranoia. HipHop's rigid percussive matrix is reined in and deflated until effects/emotions of inertia and lethargy sprawl across a wracked and cracked soundscape of strange weather, or else dub-tuned to leaking frequencies. During the frightening epic "Struggles", Tricky's bleak wisperers and half-speed croaks, echoing like apparitions of vultures, stage the music as the set of a stalker movie, a porno Western dominated by the sound effects of guns being cocked and gaitlines falling.

Three other tracks — "Overcome", "Pumpkin" and "Feed Me" — emerge as if numbed, concussed, stunned in the aftermath of a disaster. Vocalist Martina narrates these in a bruised drawl, suffused by low level digital snowdrifts. Martina's voice, swerving through nonchalance and carelessness, swagger and woe, makes this album. On the three greatest tracks — "Abbaan Fat Tracks", "Hell Is Round The Corner" and "Suffocated Love" — it creates the sun-burnished syntax, murmuring through the bursting radiance and Pearl & Dean curtain swirl of 50s filmtracks.

Critics have minimised the shock of these tracks (with the one exception of Ian Penman, who wrote at length about this music in *The Wire* 133), as if music as fabulous as the (I) compare the title as a bird from one of Borges's *Fabulous Encyclopaedias*, as the name of the 15th century trip Martina saw in a painting that looked just like Tricky could ever have been predicted or imagined before

now. It couldn't. But it has. And everyone will be changed by it.

KODWO ESMAN

Various Artists

110 Below Volume Two

BEECHWOOD BELOW 2P CD/CMCIP

The second 110 Below compilation is an excellent and intelligently thought-out demonstration of the link between HipHop and 'Triphop' (that lame word) from a company previously known for its repackaging of past dance music (Classic Funk, Classic Disco, etc.). By featuring some of the genre's progenitors (Ultramagnetic MCs, Carl Craig), 110 Below shows how the dark side of US rap has been merged with such influences as detuned jazz melodies, elements of 'World Music' and the distortion of psychedelia and punk to create a unique and bleak sound. It also demonstrates that the only difference between the music of Triphop exponents such as Howe B or Palmskin Productions and the US HipHop it partly derives from is the former's lack of interest in rapping and an attendant celebration of the self. The two opening tracks illustrate these connections and differences best. The Beatnuts' "Ya Don't Stop" is a strong HipHop cut that uses heavy beats and ethereal, spliced jazz as a bedrock to the group's lyrical flexing. It's followed by DJ Krush's classic "Kensu" (Japanese for 'smog').

Krush lays the same foundations as The Beatnuts but forgoes the vocals and adorns his beats instead with rays of haunting, scorching sounds that sear the consciousness with the intensity of a spotlight. The listener, already isolated by the lack of a human voice, finds him/herself on the end of a disturbing sonic attack.

Freddy Fresh's "Mr Roachdog" samples JVC Forest's classic "Strong Island", while the backbone of Carl Craig's "I'll Show Was AM" derives from Jimmy Spicer's deeply funky 1984 joint "Dollar Bill Y'all". HipHop looted and looped the R&B archives of the 70s, TripHoppers have latched onto this technique, turning the sound of the past into something sadder and menacingly futuristic. Triphop avoids rap's egotism because it doesn't centralise the individual. It is far more reckless in its effect, wilfully creating an atmosphere of pain and paranoia. Listening to Jazz.

Voiceprint: through Vital

Moving Shadow, Reach, Strictly
Rhythm: through SRD

Jungle 12's: retail from Section 5,
121 King's Road, Chelsea, London

Staalplaat, Multimood: through
Voltage

Les Disques Du Soleil Et De L'Acier:
through Impetus

ReRec: through Complete

MNW: Musiknätet Waxholm AB,
Box 271, 185 23 Vaxholm, Sweden

Relapse: PO Box 251, Millersville,
PAA 17551, USA

Igloo: through Cargo

Avant: through Harmonia Mundi

Electronique's "Muthafuckin' Ghost" or Howe B's "Ambidextrous," with their atmospheres of loss, confusion and broken communications, is as painful as reading old love letters

JAKE BARNES

Various Artists Dub Revolution UK Roots: High Steppin' To The Future

ROR 8207 CD

Dub is a problematic embodiment of the yearning for a lost sense of roots in an increasingly unstable and deracinated society. Dub's relationship to technology raises thorny questions about new shades and forms of race essentialism. Andrew Goodwin has noted that "we have grown used to connecting machines and funkiness." But this is a freedom accorded only to black musicians and black styles — Kraftwerk's man-machine music was seen as cold and sterile until it was appropriated by Afrika Bambaataa and Juan Atkins. With its focus on the rigorous prophesy of politicized reggae, dub in the UK has effaced the mechanical processes of dub's production, leaving only the residue of a rebellion against capital Babylon.

Taking the artifacts of King Tubby, Lee Perry, et al., as cultural ready-mades, the artists on *Dub Revolution* have created a cult of the object. Much as the musicians who grew out of Rare Groove have frozen soul and funk in time, groups like The Disciples and Zion Train have created an orthodoxy that constructs the sense of space (both literal and metaphorical) that is dub's gift to the world. Their contributions to *Dub Revolution*, "Dub Revolution" and "Cuttiefluff Dub" respectively, reduce dub to a set of stock sound effects. Without context, echo or even much in the way of drop-out, the music has no depth. Rather than making it elastic by stretching and pulling the elements that hold it together, the music has been compressed, making it dead weight.

The rest of the compilation is better, if only because the remaining tracks are a more convincing facsimile of the original "Dub Warmth" by Fish & Goat At The Controls and "Contentious Dub" by Alpha & Omega stake out the same melodic-based territory that Augustus Pablo first explored, while the guitar doubling on Testament's "Genesis Dub"

is thrown into sharp relief by a shakespearean bassline worthy of Robbie Shakespeare. Wordsound's "Dub-Hop Anthem" actually lives up to its title by fusing the ghosts of Electro keyboards and jazzy guitar riffs to deep bass and off-kilter beats.

Everything on this disc sounds too clean, too easy. Maybe it was the "imperfect" recording technologies of the old dub records that made them reverberate with such power — the engineer's literal handwork making them bitch, groan, cough and wheeze.

PETER SHAPIRO

Various Artists Innervation

STRANGE FRUIT SFRCZ 131 CD

Various Artists Creative, Innovative, Uncompromising

NATION NAT 50 CD/MC

There is little doubt in my mind that no label in this country is more finely attuned to the times than Nation. Its acts represent different reactions — as in chemical reactions — to the present plight of immigrants in the UK; they speak, therefore, to anybody confronted with the risk of alienation from the new technological world. Here are two compilations, one put out by the label itself as a representative showcase, the other — *Innervation* — a gathering of the radio sessions recorded for John Peel by the three Nation acts to have enjoyed most publicity. *Trans-Global Underground*, *Fun-Da-Mental* and *Loop Guru*. The latter's packaging deserves some attention, focusing as it does on a Hindu hand covering a swastika motif. The use of a swastika in its original Hindu context is welcome, as one may wonder what colour neo-Nazi brutes would turn were they to discover that their favoured symbol has origins in India. Is that why the swastika is covered? These contradictory signals are symptomatic of Nation's refusal to facilitate your response.

That said, Peel Sessions, indeed any recordings, rarely makes for compulsive listening once on disc. It is probably the awkward and hasty setting, halfway between a live and a studio situation, which catches the groups unawares and drives them towards unsatisfying compromise solutions. Still,

Innervation is a strong collection. *Trans-Global*'s tracks are rich evocations in their own right, although the memory of the cohesiveness and scope of the subsequent *International Times* makes them sound like sketches for what was to come. *Fun-Da-Mental* follow smoothly in that now familiar dreamy, paranoid mood. The band's victim pose has brought them to the media fore, and rendered me extremely suspicious, but I must recognise that as sonic landscapers they make me forget the doggy politics — well, until "Mr Bubbleman" erupts, or erupts, into unbearably naïf rapping. "I'm the greedy man, I hate animals, man, I hate humans... Thank you for voting for me."

From the stratosphere of concrete jungle sonic landscapes to the vulgarity of dogmatic ranting — the fall is hard. That is why I am so thankful to Loop Guru for playing the abstract card so well. "Hope (The Original Sin)," on the immediately titled *Creative, Innovative, Uncompromising*, gives out everything I expect from repetitive music: a multi-dimensional sonic sculpture hanging in the air, rich enough to reveal new facets on each hearing and yet remain harmonious.

Creative, Innovative, Uncompromising is a more pleasurable experience than the rather grim *Innervation*. Hustlers HC's "On A Ride", for example, is a welcome touch of positivity amid all the paranoia, as they effort us to discover how cool Aaa is, an area full of wise men and golden sons. I don't put the paranoia down though. England's (still) dreaming, it's good to know some people are awake.

SYLVESTRE BALAZARD

Various Artists The Theory Of Evolution

WARP 29 CD

The last things you hear on *The Theory Of Evolution* are the sounds of a synthesized fart followed by appreciative laughter. The track, if we can call it that, is a tribute to Peter Cook, not the most obvious of icons for electronic music operatives such as Tom Middleton and Mark Pritchard, the duo responsible for the bulk of the tracks collected here, but then, as anyone who knows will tell you, Middleton and Pritchard are not the most obvious of electronic music icons, either.

What they are, or rather what they

represent, is an ergonomic model for the future working practices of post-Techno electronic music auteurs (no less). As the innovations of early Techno recede further into the shadows cast by the subsequent digital revelations of Jungle, these musicians who emerged under the influence of those first Transmat 12"s are having to take stock. One possible route out of the cultural and social impasse that now underpins the notion of the isolated Techno machinist is for electronic musicians to divide and mutate, become hybrid-headed, while utilising the protean qualities of digital technology to slice, sample and graft, creating impossible new fusions and genre meetings.

This, at least, seems to be the proposition implicit in the activities of Middleton and Pritchard, once known exclusively for the "appy" Arkline track "Rootbar And Custard", but who currently release music under the names Global Communication, Link, Reload, The Jedi Knights, Chaos And The Julia Set, and probably a whole lot more. By producing music under pseudonymous personalities that work in parallel and which each have their own specific but flexible identity, Middleton and Pritchard access a series of sonic freezones, empty of the structures of audience expectations and genre convention. Such an approach has its origins in the multi-dimensional careers of Carl Craig and Aphex Twin, perhaps, and has also been adopted by other ambitious electronic musicians such as The Black Dog and ju-q, both of whom have just released brilliant extended singles on the Clear label under the names Plaid and Tusken Raiders respectively.

On *Theory Of Evolution*, the most striking example of what can occur when this process is set in motion is the ten minutes of Link's "Amenity." A long way from the longform composition of Global Communication's 76:14, Reload's austere Techno or The Jedi Knights' cyberpunk funk, "Amenity" follows tracks by such Jungles as Rön Size and Protek in making the connection between the hot rainforest fusion of Herbie Hancock's *Crossings* and the digital throats that sprout organically in the muck of the breakbeat. On "Amenity" there is no bass, gravity has receded into the labyrinths of memory, leaving the snarls, hi-hats and Fender Rhodes samples to float free, speed-writing

soundcheck

complex, azure blue arabesques high above the treeline

"Amnity" is a fantastic track, but it is just one compelling moment among many. Here is a record that maps electronic music's most compelling contemporary pathways, farts and all

TONY HERRINGTON

Mohammed Wardi Live In Addis Ababa 1994

RAGS PRODUCTIONS RPH 001 CD

A beautiful record from the most well-loved musician in Sudan. During his exile from its repressive fundamentalist government (with its distressing recent history of intimidation and violence against Muslims), Wardi has become a vital living symbol of enlightened opposition, tolerance and peace. He is also a mouthpiece for the work of many of Sudan's young poets and lyric writers. Though the topic of his music is normally love, I am told these songs contain many subtle and pointed political messages and observations, though even with the translated lyrics in front of me these ambiguities do not easily translate. But there is no mistaking the rare sense of celebration and joy with which Wardi's music resonates. His glowing, relaxed voice, which has all the poise of Arabic classical music, is very special, as is his 18 piece band which swoop delicately arranged string and brass ensemble parts over very buoyant West African-rooted reggae-like rhythms. Surprisingly, this is Wardi's first album to be available here. It has all the warlike energy of a live performance and is also beautifully recorded, surpassing virtually every other Sudanese record or import cassette I've heard.

RICHARD SCOTT

Papa Wemba Emotion

REAL WORLD CDRW 52 CD

One often-repeated idea you can quickly become sick and tired of is the notion that African pop musicians are selling out to 'the West' by using its beats and its instruments. Anyone with ears and sense can hear that all American and Latin beats, as well as nifty playing, have their direct ancestry in Africa. Why do so many think that funk has deeper roots when manifested in Detroit as opposed to Kinshasa? Is it

any wonder that Youssou N'Dour, Salif Keita or Papa Wemba are producing works not entirely dissimilar to those of European and American musicians, when the histories of these three continents have been linked inextricably for the last five centuries?

These questions must be answered for the record in hand, a cute diverse, fresh and entertaining pop record that is best assessed in its proper context, alongside similarly successful efforts by Kim Wilde or Madonna. Sacreligious? It should be remembered that Papa Wemba's own pop instinct was demonstrated throughout the 80s with his leadership of the 'sapeur' fashion, which made Amnity such a big name among Zairean youths. That he would choose to work with a world-renowned producer of disposable yet crafty pop as soon as he had the chance is no surprise, and sure enough, for this release he's roped in Stephen Hague, who has previously supervised sessions for Enurage and Pet Shop Boys.

The tracks on Emotion spotlight Wemba's delicate vocals, which, alongside the unassuming diversity of styles, are what makes it such a success. Emotion features soulful, salsa, soul — a Lingala and English version of Otis Redding's "Fa Fa Fa Fa Fa" — as well as a poignant ballad, all guaranteed to please (Western) notions of 'authenticity' lose their meaning when applied to such a project, even during the soulful numbers, for the persona Papa Wemba takes on here is a fiction, that of a good-hearted, dynamic and optimistic performer who doesn't exceed beyond the boundaries of the studio or stage.

What innovations there are, being of the Kim Wilde type, don't help us get any closer to understanding the mystiques of the universe. A record such as Emotion Lo's ba, more adventurous and far-reaching, may linger in the heart much longer than Emotion, but not as fondly. Papa Wemba's hybridization of genre musics is time-honoured and pragmatic.

SYLVESTRE BALAZARD

The Wildflowers The Wildflowers Story

VOICEPRINT VP123 CD

In The Wire 126 I reviewed The David

Allen Trio's Live 1963 (also on Voiceprint), a rediscovered lo-fi recording of the first outing from the so-called Canterbury Scene. Now, with the help of Brian Hopper (guitarist and saxophonist in those early days), Voiceprint has unearthed a selection of recordings from 1965-69 by The Wildflowers, the second chapter in the Canterbury Tale which brings us right up to the formation of one of the earliest and most influential of all Progressive groups, Soft Machine.

In the sleeve notes, Hopper's assessment of The Wildflowers suggests that they were a diversion from the earlier, more experimental work of The David Allen Trio and, later, Soft Machine, who were founded in 1966 and ran concurrently with The Wildflowers. "A diversion," he says, "with which to conform to fashionable trends and most of all to satisfy our own egos." Sufficient reason, you'd have thought, not to release these 22 fuzzy demos featuring a fluctuating group of wannabe pop stars including Robert Wyatt, Kevin Ayers, Brian and Hugh Hopper, Pye Hastings, Richard Sinclair and Richard Coughlan.

Accordingly, what you get from this eye-catching spiral-bound booklet with CD is mostly pedestrian (and a few downright embarrassing) attempts at R&B and teenage love songs, which were originally never intended for release. The poignancy of Wyatt's vocals and Ralfeedges Saxe-influenced piano harmonies on "Memories" are a delight, yet since this is from 1969 and by the same line up (with Hugh Hopper) that made Soft Machine's pathbreaking Volume Two the same year, it seems somewhat disingenuous to file it under The Wildflowers.

As it stands, The Wildflowers Story serves a useful if limited historical purpose, it's well-intentioned, but another release like this one aimed at the Canterbury nostalgia market (beware, Brian Hopper has a substantial tape collection...) would certainly start to compromise the integrity of this so far unsullied area of British Progressive rock. If you must have early Canterbury material that was never originally intended for release, seek out *At The Beginning* (Charly), which contains Soft Machine's 1967 demos which have both the sparkling immediacy of teenage pop and the early

manifestations of Soft Machine's complex instrumentalism

CHRIS BLACKFORD

Hector Zazu Songs From The Cold Seas

COLUMBIA 477585 CD

There is something particularly French about this project. 11 songs featuring artists from places as diverse as Siberia, Greenland, Hokkaido and Labrador gathered together in overtly beautiful, polished, lausonic musical settings. This is aesthetic epicureanism, wide eyed, ambitious and not a little canny in its appeal to the marketing department of Sony France. In a sense, Cold Seas mirrors even more than Zazu's Les Nouvelles Polyphones Comes or Sahara Blue the museum mentality of French anthropology where the world is plundered and tastefully reconnoitered for convenient browsing. I don't quite understand the musical logic behind using these unrelated local traditions on the one album. But despite these reservations what we have here are some irresistibly gorgeous songs.

As usual Zazu has assembled quite a cast including Siouan, Siouan, John Cale, Suzanne Vega, The Balanoglu Quartet, Harold Budd, Mark Isham, Mark Ribot, Brendan Perry, BJ Cole, Lena Willenmark, Värtina, Tokio Kato and Marina Schmidt. There is also a song by Björk which is probably the most exquisite thing she has ever recorded and is easily worth the price of the disc alone. There is no question that Zazu is a very fine composer/arranger and his work on most of these songs is inspired if a little pale, by the Finnish vocal group Värtina, is a rolling, angular chant which combines effortlessly traditional vocal phrases with warping guitar and an engine of digital percussion. Siouan's piece is also a strangely attractive mixture of folk song and ominous percussion embedded in a mesh of sometimes dissonant latticed ambience. With the exception of the Suzanne Vega track, which is relatively banal, each piece has something of interest. There are times when the raw qualities of some of the singing seems to require a more robust (less tasteful) setting and when the keyboard rigidity of much perhaps doesn't serve the traditional melodies

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THE WIRE
adventures in modern music

soundcheck

well, but as discrete pieces they are very fine.

My main gripe springs from the experience of the work as a whole. I'm reminded of those World Music compilations which work on the premise that if you enjoy a five minute edit from a six hour pygmy funeral rite then you will enjoy it even more if it is bookended by a Hawaiian chant and a court gamelan and you will also enjoy the follow up disc with more of the same plus tasteful synth underscoring and reverb. So, I love it. With reservations.

PAUL SCHÜTZE

in brief club tax

Kodwo Eshun speeds through April's hottest wax

Adam F Criminal

Active/Listen SECTION 5 PROMO 12" Sampling KR5 One on the state of being criminal minded/criminal active, this follow up to the classic "Prophet Of God" oscillates between gushing moans and swirling drum voices driven by a dub bass line that steps between worlds. "Listen" layers intersecting voices of hi-hats, cymbals and snares over each other at furious rates of nervous antagonism. A name to watch for in 95.

Cloud 9 Jasmine/Snow

MOVING SHADOW PROMO 12" "Snow," by Cloud 9 aka Nookie, is a helplessly romantic track, utterly perfect for Jungle's coming Summer of 95. Over a swathe of sunbusting synths and flushed sighs of "Touch me," a piano refrain of Betty Blue-era sweetness rolls in and against bunched masses of breaks caught in a heading velocity all their own.

Carl Craig The Climax

Remix/Clear And Present OPEN RECORDS PROMO 12" The original 1991 "Climax" is a legendary track that started as a grindingly simple guitar disco loop before tumbling off into a Sun Ra-esque electric piano odyssey — utterly astute, utterly spidery — before returning to its 1972 locked groove. The 95 version turns the disco loop into a minimal Basic Channel-style groove, relentlessly repetitive at home, fixating and raving on the dancefloor.

Very much the opposite of Jungle, it fits the Chicago/Detroit convergence currently occurring on many House and Techno dancefloors. "Piano" sounds even more forlorn and stark in 95, falling from planet to planet until it's caught and held in the metronomic wope of the track.

Dan Curtin Presents Time Undefined

Alive/Alive **Summer Rain Mix/Cascade/Cascade** (Dawn Mix) STRICTLY RHYTHM SR1231 11 12" After last year's brilliant Garage

influenced Techno album *The Silicon Dawn*, Cleveland's Dan Curtin is on a roll. His first 12" for the veteran Strictly Rhythm label has four mixes. "Alive" slides House breaks through funk guitar throttle and wildstyle Moog solos while the "Summer Rain" mix has the rustling whispers and submerged wombland of aftermath music. "Cascade (Dawn Mix)" links deep House piano with Jungle speed drum patterns, signalling the affinity between Curtin and drum 'n' bassheads like 4 Hero. Track this one down.

DJ Die & Roni Size 11:55

FULL CYCLE PROMO 12" The long awaited follow up to this duo's "Timestretch/Physical" finds them in "Gangster" and "Roll Out" mix modes. The second stays on the astonishingly chilled jazz phusion mood of Size's "The Beast" remixes. Snatches of 70s electric keyboards and guitar ticks twinkle and wink beneath a shifting metallic backdrop and a Hustler's Convention intro fit. Die and Size work by intermittence and delay, glimpse and veiling. Their "Hustle Box" trademark of cascading, tumbling breaks comes rippling through on the "Gangster" mix which exhilaratingly ups the drum attack ratio.

DJ Hype Remixes Volume One: You Must Think First

Back To Basics **Remix/Computerised Cops** (Pascal's Remix) GANJA RECORDS GAN 005 12" The Back To Basics remix of Hype's 94 classic strips the original's epic feed tempo to post-John Carpenter synths and a robotic blurt of The Wu Tang Clan's "Dopestyle" over and over. As a sample from the Clan might suggest, the beats are chopped

like kung fu movie edits — cuts, slashes, percussive-metallic extensions of James Brown's militarization of R&B into funk. "Computerised Cops", with its opening Colors sample, starts off like a bad-boy dub remix of Robocop until it's ambushed by a P-funk/Huson lick. Post-appropriation and post-Cameron, this is where the action thriller is going.

Droppin' Science Volume 5: Step Off/Volume 2: E-Z

Rollers Remix DROPPIN' SCIENCE PROMO 12" **Droppin'**

Science Volume One Remixes

DROPPIN' SCIENCE PROMO 12" E-Z Rollers frost the original hyperkinetic magic of Droppin' Science's "Volume Two" into fumes of ice-light feathers. "Step Off" is HipHop stratted away into an echoing hall of mirrors and bass bins. The remixes of "Volume One" accentuate the Oriental mirage of the original piano line, fading out its breathy sighs into a faint murmur, conjuring up sun-kissed capelles like Genes swirling up out of date. Danny Breaks (aka Droppin' Science) programs drums into landscapes and avalanches, larval sloughs of massed percussion stirred by teatonic bass groans. Wildstyle to the bone.

Jazz Juice Jazz Juice/Move Your Body

PRECIOUS RECORDS PROMO 12" On "Jazz Juice", producers of the moment Alie Renee and Wax Doctor drop a summery, eye-sheltering heat haze of a breakdown over the deliberately undropped beats. Instead of using Acan computers with Cubase software like most Junglists, they use sequencers, signalling their interest in 90s Detroit influenced Techno. Both tracks are Jungle as phusion using mid-70s keyboard samples as melodic percussion and dizzying mirages. "Move Your Body" factors Strictly Rhythm-style Garage into the mix brilliantly.

Jack Ruby Ocean

Dreams/Ophelia KNOWLEDGE RECORDS PROMO 12" "Ocean Dreams" is aquatic Jungle that directs running river breaks over woodpeck sounds and a gurgling, tumbling bassline. "Ophelia" makes clear the links between Sam Garage (Garage is to Jungle as House was to Ambient) and post-Atlantis drum 'n' bass, with its synths submerged in the

warm Gulf stream of deep House. Both the harsh hi-hat and underwater boom of the bass transmute the chill-out into paradoxical body states of languor and hardness.

Sounds Of Life

Currents/Intellect/Intellect (Release **The Belts Wax Doctor** Remix) CERTIFICATE 18 1809 12" **Sounds Of Life** **Currents** (Sounds Of Life Remix)

CERTIFICATE 18 1810 12" LTJ Bukem drops "Currents" on the dancefloor at London's young but already legendary Speed club every Thursday. It's a great example of drum 'n' bass as an immersive music, chonding the listener in huge synthetic waves, dropping you off into a deep space agitated by cross-fire beats. The remix soothes it even further into drifting bells and frosted breath. "Intellect" moves with a minimal, neurotic skittering until it dissolves along a plateau of horizon defying surf, while Wax Doctor's mix reworks the surf into streaming tears of sun-dazzling light. Two brilliant 12"s from one of 95's labels to watch.

Various Artists Jazz In The

Excellent SLP N1 SLIDE PROMO LP An excellent compilation highlighting some of the most Pacific, Sam fusion trax of the last three to four years. Although there's no Pal Joey, Reynolds Dischord, Peter Dinkov or Bobby Kerschner, you still get the classic "Our Mute Horns", Masters At Work's celestial disco cut from 1991, as well as the hallowed narco-ness of Secret Document's "Jazz Code" and Mondo Grosso's fusion meltdown "Souffle". All we need is for someone to play "Our Mute Horns" next to Carl Craig's "Bug In The Basement" next to Dan Curtin, Link and Wax Doctor and another seas of Jungle love convergence will begin to self organise. Who will seize the Now?

Various Artists Strictly

Rhythm 4 REACT PROMO LP Good compilation which catches Strictly Rhythm in 94/5 Renaissance mood. Includes George Fflure's fierce Garage loops, the luscious fusion swirls of Caucasian Boys' "Gone! Clear!" and the remorselessly homo-industrial gnoddock of Armand Van Helden's "Witchdoctor". It all drops nicely on a Wild Pitch/ReAct type of dancefloor.

new notes at a glance

information from SPNM

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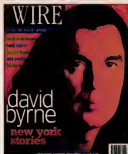
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in brief outer limits

Biba Kopf dissects the in sounds from way out

Arecibo Trans Plutonian

Transmissions ATMOSPHERE AT000 CO
Christening his latest project after the Puerto Rican satellite dish that bounced digitized transmissions of human behaviour into the deepest reaches of space, Industrial Ambient veteran Brian Lustmord (crazy name, nice guy) claims his sound sources are the pulsars, quasars, thermal radiation, etc. recorded by NASA's deep space network. If it's vaguely distressing to hear the Cosmos speaking to you in the voice of a Star Trek dude (in "Pulse Beat Deception"), *TJP* achieves a weightless balance of rocket-whooosh com, pulsating mystery and, very occasionally, a sense of awe before the yawning vastness hinted at by Lustmord's sound designs

Beequeen Time Waits For No

One STAMPLAAT ST 080 CO Droneology #1
The drone is Ambient's analogue of locking into a groove. Once there, too many artists abrogate all compositional responsibility and leave the technique to do the work. Dutch duo Beequeen at least pay meticulous attention to building van-textured drones and atmospheres, but they're more skilful craftsmen than sonic architects. Their samples, burbling sulphurous textures and random drifts through dreamtime are, finally, too familiar to raise the music to the level of its beautiful Marilyn Monroe-fronted packaging

Deutsch Nepal/In Slaughter Natives Mort

Aux Vaches STAMPLAAT ST CO
Droneology #2 where Industrial churning merges with Goth gurning. In *Slaughter Natives*' descriptively titled *Awakening* (Clean Cathedral) is a wonderful hollow of cold, howling crypt sounds, tolling bells, circling vulture squeals, disembodied choir, severed finger piano exercises and Gregorian moans. They run it all with the Harmon Planter baritone vocal that signals a downside into the kind of dre Electro-Techno mechanismo begat by Ministry and, lately, Nine Inch Nails. Droneology #3: Deutsch Nepal's masima of mesmerisms is confounded from voiceboops, sulk atmospherics and yo-yo

sample trickery. Their barren dronescapes work up emotive elegies evocative of some lost land

Lutz Glandien Scenes From

No Marriage REC REC LG1 CO
For all its fiddliness, tape composition hasn't been rendered entirely obsolete by the computer. As a sound reproducer, it's less reliable, but also less restrictive than the sample's tiny envelope. It also has the advantage of hands-on malleability. Schooled in pre-digital composition in the former DDR, Glandien sometimes treats taped noise like it was entrails spilling from the real instrumentation it tries up or loosely coils. At times it's difficult, but it's never dry. "Strange Drums," for Chris Cutler and tape, is tense and tempestuous, as Cutler's storms of steel strain to burst the surface tension that would contain them

God Is My Co-Pilot Sex Is For Making Babies

LES DISQUES DU SOLEIL ET DE L'ACIER OSA 54093 CO
The politics of gender complaint of the early 80s replaced by 90s Peel favourites from NYC. GIMP-P make guitar, sax and sharp-tongued baroque dance schreck-to-shriek with ferocious satirical intent, especially on "Immigration," where Sharon Topper (I think) mimics contemptuously the spiteful capings of a spurned seducer

Jeff Greinke Changing Skies

MULTIMEDIA HMC 009 CO
On holiday from his more challenging group Illusion Of Safety, Greinke is content to originate some pleasant ambient sounds and then leave them to "scape" themselves to a Eno and Cluster. It's as easy on the ear as watching clouds roll by in the eye. All too rarely, an intrusive element, like tolling bell gloom or amplified tabla-style patters, reminds you the music's there. Disappointing.

HALO Immanent

MHWCO 265 CO
Sector Industrial Cosmetics ATMOSPHERE AT01 CO
In their respective approaches, HALO's Graham Lewis (Wire, He Said) and Sector's Dean Dennis (Clock DVA) invariably underline the rad-art-rad-politics equation. Yet, like The Fall, they always come across as engaged. Here, they reanimate socially inadequate dance games, whose slacker tendencies are normally masked as novelty posing

as radical innovation. HALO solders hard. House flux and hard-hat vocal muscality to lyrics (I) to create a scandalous hybrid, a contemporary dance song — a vessel that negotiates turbulent electronic currents to convey meaning and emotion. It's sacrificed earlier laconic textures at the altar of his renewed rage, but the plus is the punch that prevents HALO being annexed to the cowbell. Sector start badly with sleeveless about cybernetics serving man — thanks for the tip, Den. Thereafter the pulse deepens and the trance locks in effectively enough

Merzbow Noisebryo

GLD001 CO
Merzbow Venerology RELAPSE RA 6910 CO
Tokyo noisemeister Merzbow is a throwback to a pre-cybernetic industrial age which delighted in arousing its audience erotically through direct noise assaults on the flesh. If his sophomoric cod-scientific obsessions with bondage and mutant disease both date and too easily locate his art to Joanne Through A Body-era Throbbing Gristle, there's no denying the physical impact of his noiseworks, compacted from gruzzled, grating electric fuzzes, thuds and deeply submerged melodies, the whole is then textured and layered and rotated through grinding rhythm figures. Little to choose between them, perhaps, except Noisebryo has a cute pink roman porno sleeve

Bob Ostertag's Fear No

Love Fear No Love AWANT AWAN 041 CO
Various Artists Must Be Mental PARAGRAPH PA 09 CO
Ostertag's method of computer-anatomising his colleagues' contributions into samples and mechanically constructing songs out of them is more than usually redundant on of this mildly diverting, dirty talking and dirty pseudo-funk outing. The comparison of his musical transvestism with the songs' drag bar locations noted, there's little else to talk about. Ostertag could be the respectable cousin to the Must Be Mental family — Meat Machine, Phrakts Dei, A Split Second, Red Harvest, In Slaughter Natives, et al — impoverished Ed Gein geeks one and all, who dabble out a diseased mad-cow mash of New Beat nonsense and the nouveau industrial mechanism mentioned above (see Mort Aux Vaches)

Rough Assemblage

Construction And Demolition AWANT AWAN 017 CO
Mathematics isn't necessarily the square root of rhythm, die? (Ask Anthony Braxton) The three composers making up the Rough Assemblage collective (brought to a premature end by the road death of their youngest member Eric Qini) are bonded by a common interest in repetition, rotation and serial permutation. Mark Degliantoni's two pieces are distinguished by their role reversals for samples (rhythmic underpinning) and percussion (textual action, narrative interest). Norman Yamada's contentious "Fear One" interrogates courageously the notion of revolutionary romanticism advanced to the nth extreme. Rigorously Reckian in conception, Eric Qini's two contributions are the most fascinating: the second playfully re-stages E. Muybridge's motion experiments for overbudded electrified basses. Awant promise a posthumous Qini album soon. The sooner the better

Various Artists Endless #1

MANFOLD MAN 01 CD
This *Isolations*/Ambient compilation opens with a typically seductive Paul Schutze piece that sets itself up as a virtual soundfield, everything in place, awaiting a signifier — ie you, dear listener "Rain Trees" by the Japanese guitarist KK Null is as evocative as its title. From then on, it's hit, miss and mess, all three at once in the case of Lull, who contributes 23 minutes of drifting nothingness — the exact reverse of Schutze's composed piece. Eventless, purposeless, rulerless, affectless, here is where Ambient floats off the map

Various Artists Step To

Another World Music REC REC REC02 SO CO
A splendid 50th release/anniversary of the many Byzantine rhythms mapped by Recommended and the Swiss label Rec Rec over the decade. Venturing from its Zurich base, the label has smuggled musics across borders and timezones. It was there to catch on tape any number of avantist idiosyncratic dance, polka, swing and accordion-driven dance ensembles at the point of their electrification. The Red Rec set also intersects with 80s NYC loft zones. In all, a fine, thrilling staging post for the rediscovery of lost recordings by Fred Firth, The Ex/Tom Cora, etc. □

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cd i Goff something new, but we're not sure what yet. MC 900's Jesus-1 step ahead cd Neu-1, 2 & 75 cds i Kraftwerk-1, 2, Ralph & Florian i Organisation cds i Harmonia-some & deluxe cds Plus lots of other Kraut Rock - Cluster, Can, Roskilde, Faust etc etc etc etc etc

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The last word on the choicest scribbles from the musical fraternity

In this month's books section:

Bob Marley lionised; outing the musical establishment; rock'n'roll redeemers; an Improv soliloquy

Bob Marley: Songs Of Freedom

By Adrian Boot & Chris Salewicz

BLOOMSBURY (Hbk £25)

Published on what would have been Bob Marley's 50th birthday, this superb book is an entirely fitting tribute to his memory, so much so that it is difficult to envisage anything of equal merit appearing in the near future. For example, although WW Norton's recent *Spirit Dancer* has many beautiful photos of Marley by photographer Bruce Talmon and a nice introduction by *Billboard* editor and Marley biographer Timothy White, it suffers from the inclusion of an over-arduous essay by leading Marley scholar Roger Steffens that actually detracts from the impact of the fine photos. 1994 also saw the publication of *Marley And Me* by the singer's former manager Don Taylor, whose overall bitter tone lacked objectivity. In contrast, this book is produced with the co-operation of Marley's widow Rita, credited as executive editor, and so carries a kind of 'official' endorsement from the Marley estate. Happily, the official backing has not turned the book into a public relations exercise, what emerges here is a convincing, and as far as I can make out, pretty factual effort.

The majority of the photographs are by Adrian Boot, many have not been seen before. They complement the excellent and well-researched text by Chris Salewicz, who has talked to many who knew Marley intimately, not only his immediate family and friends, but also those who knew him in the Jamaican music business. In particular, his research has uncovered a wealth of information on Marley's formative years, additionally, Salewicz has

interviewed seminal figures like Prince Buster to obtain valuable contextual information on the 'teenies' of Jamaican music, thus the reader will additionally discover much about the Jamaican music scene in general, making it an ideal introduction to this somewhat undocumented (but exceedingly important) popular music form interspersed throughout the main narrative covering Marley's life and work are fascinating sections on the history of Jamaica, and Rastafarianism.

The overall picture that emerges is of a supremely gifted individual who was able to capitalise on his indisputable talents and thereby bring his vision before the world, which continues to enjoy the fruits of that vision. What also emerges (and which may be unpalatable to some) is that this considerable achievement was made possible by the financial and moral support of Chris Blackwell and Island Records. Many people in Jamaica who have no financial interest in Bob Marley, have told me the same thing over the years: The world being the way it is, it's no surprise that there are those who, for example, see the Bob Marley story as another 'rip-off' of black culture by 'greedy' whites. Those labouring under that particular delusion would do well to investigate this fine book, if only to finally understand that Bob Marley's message was for the whole of humanity, not just one part of it.

STEVE BARROW

Queer Noises

By John Gill

CASSSELL (Hbk £35/Pbk £12.95)

Queer Noises is a finely written account of numerous, sometimes shadowy,

Queer lives dotting the history of 20th century music. Of course, the chief obstacle for any historian of homosexuality is the often ephemeral nature of the available documentation: rescent and anonymous accounts, the well covered traces of future relationships, rumour, allusion, oblique references from lost correspondence and sometimes coded intimations within the music itself. There is also a profound taboo against contesting consensus histories.

In contrast to much of the recent slew of post-structuralist cultural analysis, *Queer Noises* is something of a lone voice and is shaped more by the absence of supporting texts than by any clear role in an ongoing, fashionable dialogue. Some readers will see immediately the need for such a study, while others may be bemused by John Gill's enthusiasm for Queering what they may see as their pitch. Gill, who is an ex-*Time Out* music editor and author of the *Pet Shop Boys* biography, *Please*, does not use the book for the purpose of a gratuitous head count nor to out unwilling artists, but neither does he shy away from legitimate speculation which too often dissolves into air during the writing of official biographies. As certain factions in the music industry will adamantly construct and defend a persona they know to be a lie to reinforce an archetype of worth, it is important for queer culture to redress this by publicising facts which have been ignored or repressed.

In the case of Benjamin Britten, for instance, a polite English form of denial, in which his homosexuality was known yet conveniently overlooked, meant that numerous clues and accounts are now emerging to verify it beyond doubt. Bessie Smith left written



PHOTO: ADRIAN BOOT

Bob Marley

and verbal accounts of her bisexuality, due to an openness on her part and some degree of acceptance from those around her (excluding her violent and parasitic husband). Had she felt under too much pressure to be so open and thus built an effective closet, we may have had no traces of her true life at all. In the case of David Bowie we have a veritable mountain of material, all verified by the man himself. Of course his queerness was just another invention, albeit a powerfully real one for many gay men at the time. It also begged the question: would he have come out with such a bang if he had actually been gay? Perhaps he really thought being queer was a fashion statement.

However, all the above mentioned difficulties coalesce in the case of Miles Davis. Gill talks of numerous "vehemently off the record" accounts from the jazz fraternity of Miles having "entertained" "whole strings of young boyfriends." Some of the reactions this section of the book has produced distill both the cause and staying power of covert queerness, and alone demonstrate the need for more books like it.

Indeed, it is where *Queer Noises* launches on jazz and the avant garde (serious male musics) that things get particularly interesting. Gill raises questions about the role of a queer sensibility within these traditionally "camp-free" zones and consequently about the preconception that queer voices are identified principally by camp packaging. At one point he argues persuasively that both jazz and marginal contemporary musicians have a significant gay following, and although the world's gay press would seem to indicate otherwise, it is important to explore the possibility of a passionate "queerness" running through such areas. If this exploration can help to define an alternative to the prevailing lightweight status of contemporary queer music then all the better.

After reading the book, I talked with John Gill and we discussed the difficulties of open, published analyses within the context of an often queer-hostile industry and the commercial pressures which hold many a closet closed, as well as the difficulty of verifying accounts when sources won't be named, and the huge quantity of



Miles Davis: queer noise?

material — speculative and extrapolative — which could not be included in the book.

In spite of all that, Gill has written a brave and provocative book which invites serious debate and offers a solid foundation for future work in shaping a legitimate and true history of music, a history which, ultimately, will serve all those who participated in it.

PAUL SCHÜTZ

Hungry For Heaven: Rock 'N' Roll And The Search For Redemption

By Steve Turner

HODDER & STOUGHTON (PBK£7.99)

A few years ago, researching a piece on those old allies, rock and the devil, I spoke to a certain Pastor Maloney from Burton-on-Trent who spent much of his time spinning records backwards by hand. His attempt to detect diabolic messages struck me as a cute, punky British DIY response to the increasingly corporate stand-off between rock and religion. The Americans might have had Tippe Gore and the PMRC, but we had Pastor Maloney and his 45 RPM finger

Steve Turner's wish with this book, he writes, is to offer alternatives to the traditional opposition. He wants to build a link between St Augustine's "Man was made for God and his heart is forever restless until it finds a rest in Him" and Bruce Springsteen's "Everybody's got a hungry heart." The Boss's heart, he suggests, is looking for God. This is Turner's greater ambition. The lesser is to provide a chronological run-through of performers and their religious connections. This ranges from the Southern black baptists and their white counterparts in the 50s, through the non-Christian spiritual mumbo jumbo of the 60s, to rap as the voice of the Nation of Islam.

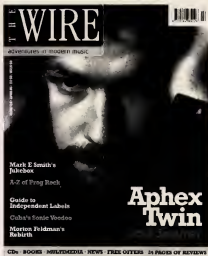
Turner covers all the ground thoroughly enough, but increasingly his premise nags. His contention is that all 'searching' rock 'n' roll is at base reaching out for God. This applies to the gospel-turned-soul singers, who recognise a reaction against their Church upbringing, but also to those — like Springsteen — who acknowledge no belief. Turner gives no hint that he understands how easily his premise can be turned on its head. Why not instead start from the premise that we want to reach beyond and to represent this

urge, and some people find it helps to talk of God? Instead, he harnesses his heroes. After describing Springsteen's religious lesson, he chastises him for fudging the issue. ("Springsteen" realises that a religious answer is needed and compensates by dressing existential advice in glorious heavenly imagery.")

U2 were a Godsend. They were what Christian rock fans who'd had to separate their passions had been praying for. Turner lets us in on the concerned debate that took place in the Christian press after the band's supposed swing (circa *Achtung Baby*) towards irony and doubt. (Some of us are still waiting for it.) Comparing the old U2 with the 'new', as elsewhere, questions of quality take a back seat to whether or not the musicians are a force for 'good'.

Of course, it's always healthy to have a corrective to the silly sacrilegious posturing (Jagger called it a "Baudelaire phase") which has always been the easy way to dress rebellion. And in the passages on rap and Islam, Turner contrasts nicely the appeal of the clean-living, disciplined rhetoric of the Nation of Islam to kids accustomed to mess, not order. For them, a walk on the wild side is not such a sexy thrill.

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Still, as Turner acknowledges, Chuck D and Ice Cube, among others, are not so much interested in the devotional religious top as in the politics of power. The heaven they're hungry for is on earth.

ROBERT YATES

Company Week

By Peter Riley

COMPATIBLE RECORDING AND PUBLISHING (PBK £5.00)

This is a very odd book, but in its address solicits attention. Much of what *The Wire* covers works like that — mimicry of the operations of the music industry rather than provision of commodities, a door to a parallel world. As punk saw so clearly, musical rebellion is quickly recuperated to serve Top Ten conformity. Tired of bucking a system that shoves everything through the mass-product sausage machine, musical subversives look longingly at the one-off ethos of high art. The KLF's Bill Drummond exhibits hand-made books at Blast First's Dsotby club. The Horikens resurrect the old sandpaper-to-scratch-your-collection caper for their latest 12", Anthony Braxton writes pieces for classical orchestras.

On Derek Bailey's invitation, Peter Riley attended Company Week in May 1977. Unable to air his observations in anything other than a small-press volume (*The Musicians The Instruments*, Many Press, 1978), he presented Bailey with a notebook of handwritten comments. Now, Bailey's Incus label, masquerading as Compatible Recording And Publishing (an acronym that allows the fascists to put "CRAP" on the spine, and thus desecrate your bookshelf), have issued the book in facsimile. As a change from the usual chit-chat engaged in between academic soft sociology and music journalism, here is a message from the unrepentant avant garde, a limited edition 'poet's book' on art-paper.

Free improvised music is notoriously hard to nail down — what other musical genre refers to its albums as 'documents'? — and Riley is not about to shrink the difficulties with sensational accounts of instrumental prowess. If you check out the record documenting the Company festival which is his muse (Company 6-5-7, Incus 07) you will find

crisply posed music deeply imbued with Chicago free jazz (Anthony Braxton and Leo Smith are both in attendance), Han Bennink's drums, cascading and vitriolic, saxophonists Lol Coxhill and Evan Parker in excellent form, etc. etc. Riley, though, concentrates on the elusive nature of free playing and his own private responses (psycho-geographic accounts of walking through London to the venues, be they the ICA or the Roundhouse) and the temptation to sentimentality offered by music's apparent disappearance into air.

Mixing jazz and poetry invites catastrophe — rhapodic whiteboy hipsters colonizing black music as an occasion for breastbeating. However, Riley is acutely aware of such pitfalls. His observations are never less than accurate, self-deprecatory and imaginative. Like John Wilkinson ("Hamitodics" in *Flung Clear*, Parataxes) and Clerk Coolidge (*The Rava Improvisations*, Sun & Moon), he injects the obstreperous, right-angled invention of free jazz into his poetry. Company music proposes that what happens here and now is more interesting than the hype and frenzy of commercial reputation. Riley is completely at home with that ethic.

There are intriguing references to punk, the Silver Jubilee and to the post-hippy meffits populating the Roundhouse bar. In 1977, the whole culture was about to be turned upside down (for me, if not for Riley) in their enthusiasm for Incus Records (and later Company Week appearances), Eugene Chadbourne and John Zorn showed that Bailey's art intrusiveness offered more mileage for punk rebels than 'alternative' worthiness.

Bailey's anti-commodity paradoxes are perhaps too quickly subsumed in Riley's post-Situationist quietism: small-press tastefulness (plus the arts-crafts whiff of calligraphy), when we want the shiny baubles of anti-art. I await the arrival of the poetic equivalents to Zorn and Chadbourne with some impatience. However, now that Company Week is no longer a future, a book like this recalls powerfully the uncanny grip of the music — noisy craps, unwellcome bargains-in, mess, magic and all.

BEN WATSON

(Available from Incus Records, 14 Downs Road, London E5 8DS)

multi-media

Mark Espiner scans State 51's musical interface on the Internet

As one infected UK musician once sang, "This is the 51st state of the USA." If that's the case, then for God's sake let's hang on to a healthy dose of British cynicism and eccentricity. Certainly, this is the ethos shared by those behind one of the most original websites of the moment, and certainly the most interesting: State 51.

State 51 is a group of image makers, musicians and producers who have a spot on the Net, but they are far more than a website 'magazine'. I first came across them outside of virtual environments, websites or cyberspace in the real (or should that be surreal?) location of The Big Chill, the innovative day/nightclub hosted at the Union Chapel in North London. Noticing a photographer snapping Polaroids with some kind of purpose, I followed him as he probed further into the club and was led to State 51's 'interactive dancefloor'. Stuck to the floor and walls were pressure pads, as people leaned against or walked across them, they triggered sequenced noises from the customised sound system. Cryptic utterances such as "The monkey is dead" mixed with a crescendo of storm sounds and strange rhythmic pulses. Ben Park, the musician responsible for this interactive dance-dictated sound collage, threw out his own music through a MIDI wind controller, as a group of kooky folks jumped around, triggering sounds to a pattern. The event was truly theatrical.

Meanwhile, the Polaroids were being scanned into computers in the corner and downloaded onto the Internet as a live transmission of the event, along with textual comment. People were logging on from America and Hungary and sending comments. Clearly the 'happening' was occurring well beyond the confines of the room. I looked at

the slide projections and the dancing, listened to the sound being directed by the participants and thought: these people are on to something. And they have been on to it for some time.

State 51 grew out of Oscar Music And Media, an enterprise run by Philip Crewdson and Paul Sanders. Their first projects involved experiments with MIDI technology. In 1991 they produced an 'ultrasound' system that could sense changes in the immediate environment (eg someone waving their hands in the air) and, in response, play back music—rather like their dancefloor pads, but with airspace as the interactive 'component'. They called this an air harp. In 1993, working with Roy Gehhaar, the inventor of a process called Sound+Space, they took the idea further to make a space fully responsive by leaning around in a defined region, a whole array of sounds and musical patterns would be generated. The process found further expression last year at the Set: The Night On Fire event at the South Bank.

From then, Crewdson and Sanders decided to experiment further, to deliver interactive experiences into the home. Their first attempt to create new media events was a collaboration with the Digital Nomads—a group involved in creating interactive multimedia—for a CD-i title called ICE. This was one stage further than CD-i projects by Hex and Coldcut; the animations were not only controllable, but as the user manipulated them, the music that played was remixed in response. State 51 now plan to use the same technique using video—an exciting, if technically complicated, prospect.



The Internet is State 51's true milieu, however. Paul Sanders compares the birth of the Net to the beginning of pirate radio in the 60s, and the culture that emerged as a result, not least the genesis of the 7" single and nightclubs playing the hits from the radio stations. The comparison is astute. The Net does provide a backdrop, but it is, in addition, a media rich environment. Artistic aims are hard to achieve, however, when the process of getting an image or piece of music in front of the user is an endeavour in itself. Establishing a navigable media space which is not simply a point and click environment but an experience that is rewarding is a major challenge. But it is a challenge that needs to be met if technology is going to be of real value: a certain amount of artistic hard labour is required to launch technology into the flow of culture in a society, and State 51 seem to be fully engaged in the attempt.

With a recent commission from Virgin Records to provide on-line services on the Net and at their own site, State 51 are taking on the role of video promo makers, using the Net as their medium. Among the stable of Virgin acts is Massive Attack, a group strong on branding and very creative in their approach to the relationship between music and video. State 51 have been working with the group on an interface which enhances these qualities and reassembles the constituent media of

the group within the new Net space. This sounds and looks amazing and will be online before too long.

State 51's 'magazine on the Net' is their most precious. When it was launched late last year, only 300 people were logging on per week, now it has over 2500 regular users. With fellow contributors and partner including journalist Cynthia Rose, who provides 'Real Time Hot Tips' on pop culture (at the moment, Bhunga! music), and Tim Middleton, who has integrated PHAT! (the controversial magazine that lost its place on the shelves of WH Smiths) into State 51's site, Crewdson and Sanders have created a diverse, stimulating and eccentric view of the world. The comic columnist Colin snaps at Future Sound Of London in his review of Retro Sound Of Leeds or RSO, (R-Sol, get it?), the 'Knowhere Guide To The UK' tells you, among other things, where the good fish and chip shops are in Nottingham, or the off-the-road pubs in Dublin. This is gritty, cynical Britain on the Net without a hint of 'phutural' jargon. In fact, the word 'cyberspace' has been editorially banned from the site.

Where State 51 moves, something happens: a space responds to movement and makes music; the boundaries of 'cyberspace' are encouraged to enclose a place of real expression and experience. Watch their space. State 51 is located at <http://www.state51.co.uk/state51/>

clive bell

unravels the threads of music's rich tapestry

There used to be a link between contemporary music and Early Music, with a lot of audiences being interested in both. Current favours of the month The Hilliard Ensemble still sing 12th century polyphony and minimalist pieces by Gavin Bryars in the same programme. And several Early Music specialists in Holland used to play free improvisation as well. Steve Wishart still plays both genres on fiddle and hurdy-gurdy. But I'm not sure if that link is still strong, given the enormous increase in the popularity of Early Music, authentic period instruments and so on. Even The Hilliards, selling thousands of copies of their ghostly jam session with Jan Garbarek, risk becoming a mainstream act.

Anyway, mainstream or not, I'm off to see The New London Consort on the South Bank. Sounds like an escort

agency, but in fact it's one of our top medieval groups, featuring the stunning talents of violinist Pavlo Berosiuk and singer Catherine Bott. Never mind your opera stars and your kd lang's, Ms Bott is the singer for me. Her voice is rich and light in perfect proportion, like a fine melon (as in the old adage about wives for duty, boys for pleasure and a melon for ecstasy). On stage she just radiates personality: music's answer to Dawn French.

Medieval music lets you think back to an earlier Europe, in close contact with Arabic culture, with a common language in Latin, and a time before the continent got divided up in the 19th century manner. Musically there's a lot of freedom and improvisation involved, so that Berosiuk can take his time over an improvised fiddle introduction to a song in a way that European art music

has done its best to abandon for the last six centuries.

On my way to the concert, I read an interview with James Elroy, the US crime writer whose work is a kind of psycho-beatnik celebration of corruption and depravity. Elroy has served time, he tells us, for breaking into houses and snuffing women's underwear.

The shift from Elroy into the medieval world of The New London Consort proves smoother than I expected. The first song of the evening was written by a pirate turned hermit called St Goedic. According to the programme notes, "Whenever he felt the desire to sin he would don an iron corset and stand in the river till the urge had passed."

Then comes a 12th century lyric by Walter Of Chatillon, which the notes paraphrase thus: "Look around you — integrity is in a coma, virtue dead and buried. All break the laws and proceed to legalised criminality." This is Elroy's patch all right.

Suddenly, I notice the group look a bit like the cast of *Reservoir Dogs*. No polo neck shirts here, they're all in black suits and starched white collars, and they look deadly serious. Perhaps they've got someone bleeding to death backstage.

I force myself to concentrate on the music. The emotional highpoint is the 13th century *Cantigas De Amigo*, a group of seven love songs. The composer, the excellently named Martin Codax, came from Vigo, and had an obsession with the place. He couldn't write more than two lines without mentioning Vigo. In spite of this his songs are extremely moving, and there is much blowing of noses as they finish. "I am all alone in Vigo, I have no one to watch over me save my two eyes, constantly weeping, deep in love." □



Frederic Paris is an extraordinary French musician specialising in his own version of the Auvergne folk tradition. I'd only heard him on record, playing bagpipes and hurdy-gurdy.

Nowadays he seems mainly to play cello, but anyway I was keen to hear him live, and I recently found him playing in a London University hall of residence with portraits of the Queen all over the place. The first half hour was a straightforward concert, mainly of Frederic's own tunes, accompanied by Gilles Chacornat on hurdy-gurdy. This was excellent, a kind of jazz folk, like Jimmy Gaffire at the village pump.

Then imagine my surprise when the entire audience stands up, 60 or 70 of them, to perform French folk dances for the rest of the evening. Bourrées, rhy waltzes, gavottes, nothing stops these people — they seem to learn the steps as they go along, and they keep going till midnight with not a bass, drum or computer sequence in sight. Where is this blessed place, I hear you cry. Well, it calls itself "On Bouger", it's on the third Monday of each month, and you'll have to ring 0171 383 4627 to learn more. □

house of bamboo

I have this small bamboo percussion instrument. It's about 14 inches long, and it's just a piece of split bamboo really, shaped like a two-pronged dagger. A friend brought it back from a holiday in the Philippines, if you hold one end and tap the split part on your knee, you can make a twangy rhythm a bit like a jaw's harp sound. I've never seen anyone play it for real, but I was told that Philippine mothers use it to lull babies to sleep. So you might call it a bamboo lullaby dagger.

The other day I was invited to play in The Cauldron, the Ambient room at London's weekly Megapolis club. This was my first ever Ambient gig, and the occasion was to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the Sonic Arts Network, those electro-acoustic musical practioners. They were due to be let loose in the club to create a six hour, non-stop live soundtrack, so I took along a bag of instruments. But on the door I was thoroughly searched, and I had to explain what they all were. They let me keep the cymalom, but the bamboo dagger was confiscated and locked in a safe. I could see their point — after a drink at the Smart Bar, or a session on the Rontronics DeltaBeta Brain Machines, I might well have run amok with my bamboo twanger and carved up the punters at the Tannic Sexual Workshop in the Techno Science Suite. It's getting tough being a working musician these days. □



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